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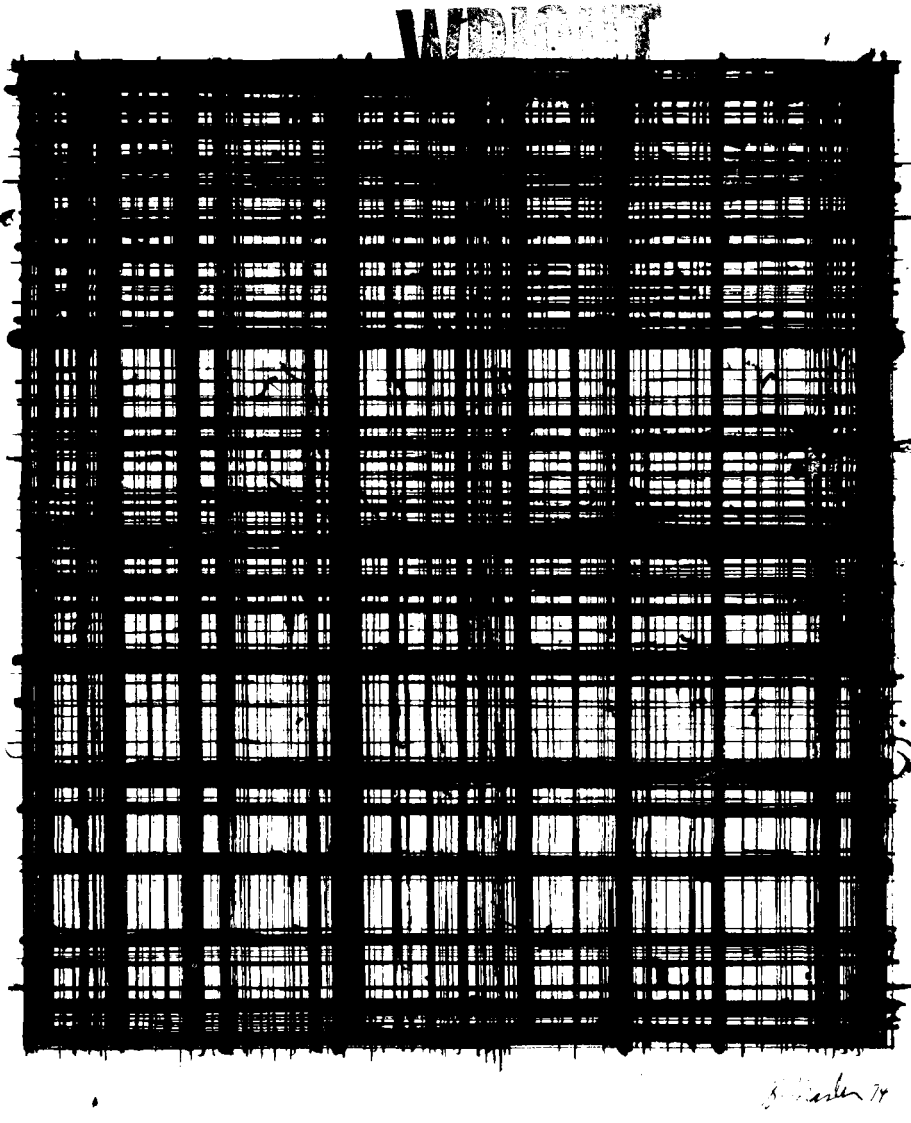

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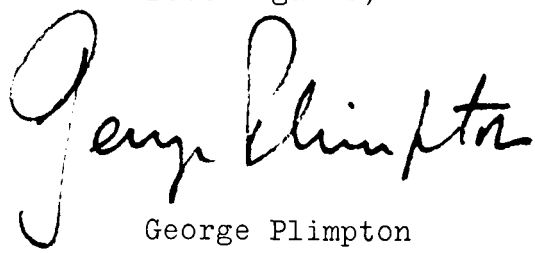

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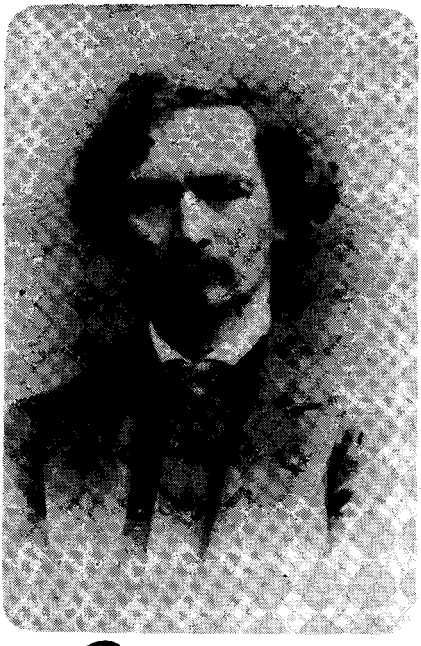

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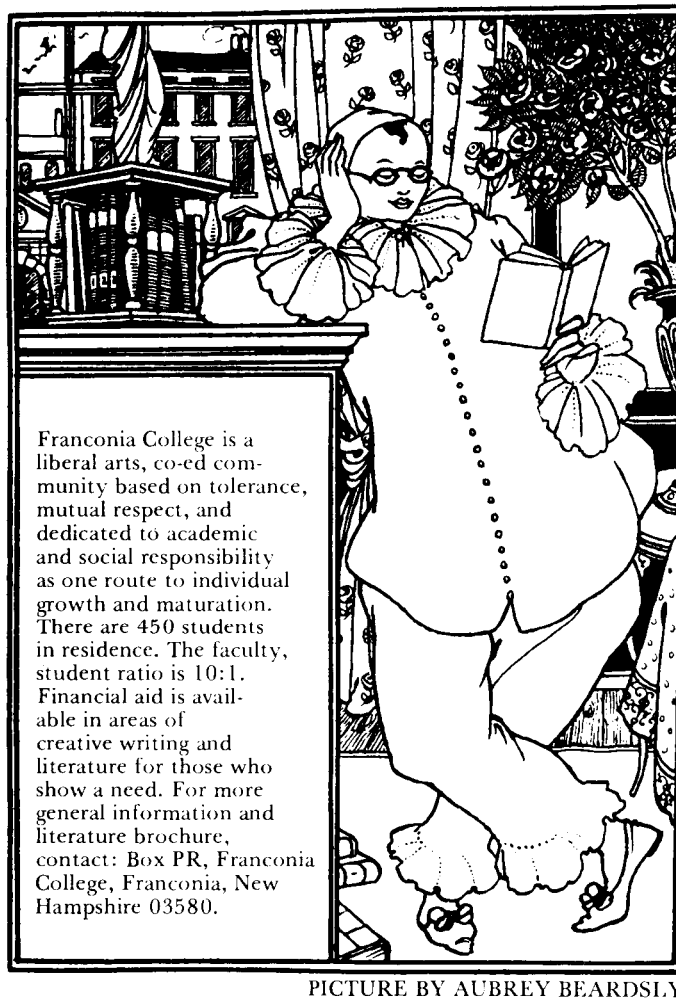

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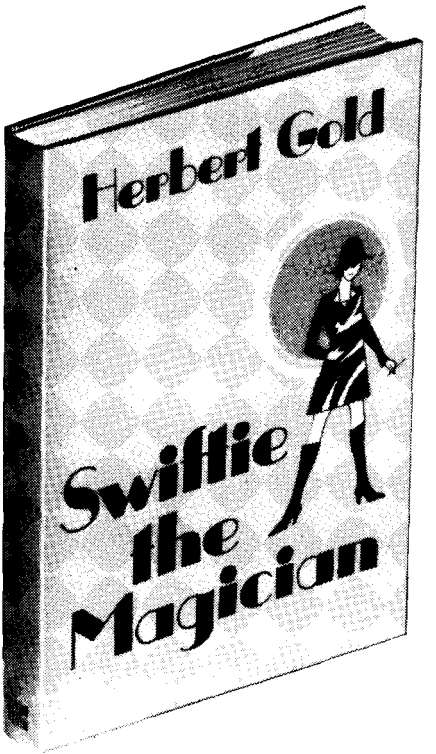

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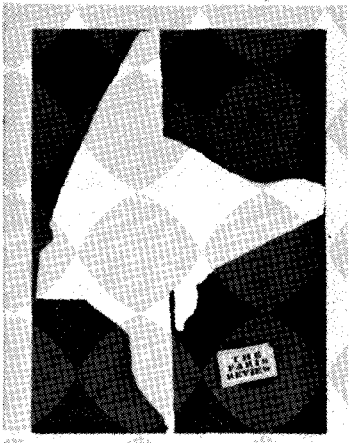

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The Paris Review is published by The Paris Review, Inc., Vol. 15, No. 60, Winter 1974. Office: 45-39 171 Place, Flushing, New York 11358. Distributors in the USA: Eastern News Company. Printed in USA by Capital City Press.

Price per copy in USA: $1.95; in France: 8F; in the UK: 62p. Post-paid subscription for six issues $9, for twelve issues $15, for life $80. Postal surcharge of $1.00 per six issues outside USA (excluding life subscriptions). Subscription blank is bound within magazine.

Fiction manuscripts should be submitted to the Flushing office; poetry to Michael Benedikt c/o The Paris Review, 541 East 72nd St., New York City 10021. Manuscripts will not be returned unless accompanied by addressed envelope and stamps or international postage coupons.

Charter members of the Association of Literary Magazines of America, CCLM and COSMEP.

Second Class Postage Paid at New York, New York.

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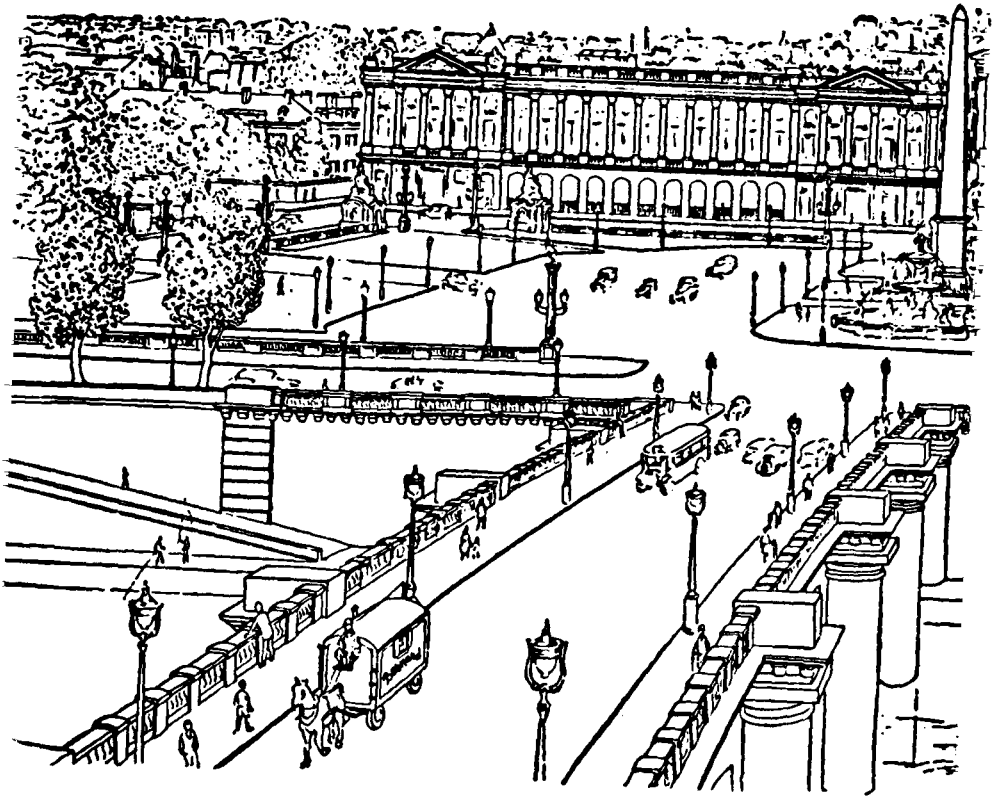

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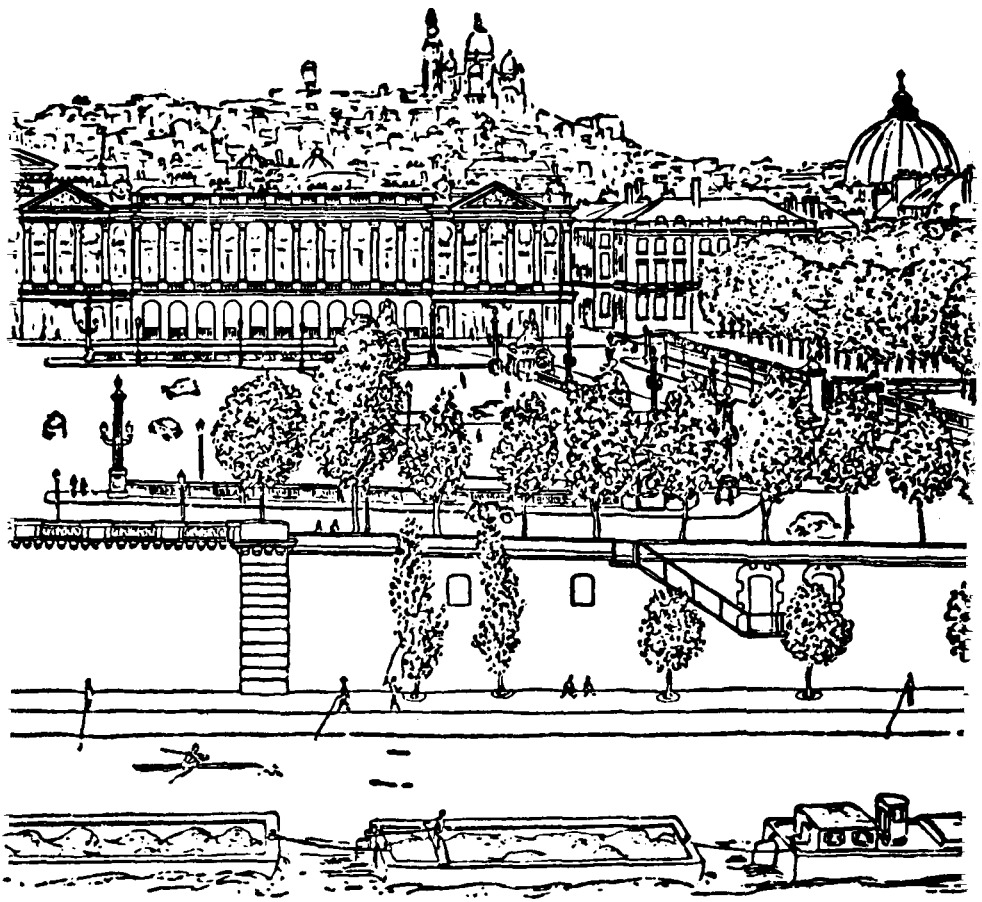

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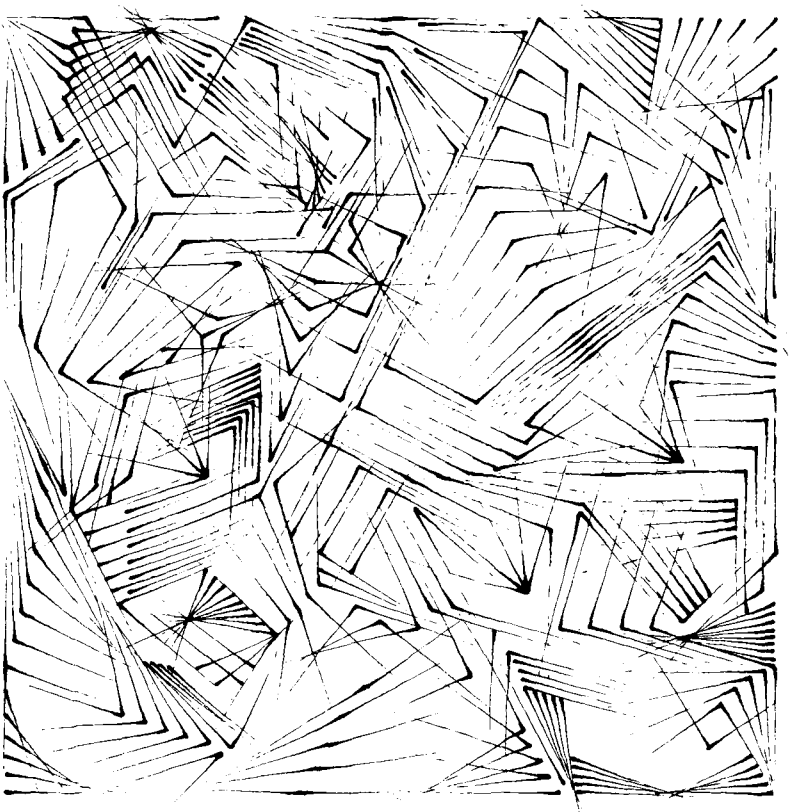

Frontispiece by William Pène du Bois
Cover art by Brice Marden, #11, 1973, Ink on Paper.
Table of Contents drawing by Robert Horvitz, Heat #4

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Two Poems by Anne Sexton

THE POET OF IGNORANCE

Perhaps the earth is floating,
I do not know.
Perhaps the stars are little paper cutups
made by some giant scissors,
I do not know.
Perhaps the moon is a frozen tear,
I do not know.
Perhaps God is only a deep voice,
heard by the deaf,
I do not know.

Perhaps I am no one.
True, I have a body
and I cannot escape from it.
I would like to fly out of my head,
but that is out of the question.
It is written on the tablet of destiny
that I am stuck here in this human form.
That being the case
I would like to call attention to my problem.

There is an animal inside me,
clutching fast to my heart,
a huge crab.
The doctors of Boston
have thrown up their hands.
They have tried scalpels,
needles, poison gasses and the like.
The crab remains.
It is a great weight.
I try to forget it, go about my business,

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cook the broccoli, open and shut books,
brush my teeth and tie my shoes.
I have tried prayer
but as I pray the crab grips harder
and the pain enlarges.

I had a dream once,
perhaps it was a dream,
that the crab was my ignorance of God.
But who am I to believe in dreams?

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TWO HANDS

From the sea came a hand,
ignorant as a penny,
troubled with the salt of its mother,
mute with the silence of the fishes,
quick with the altars of the tides,
and God reached out of His mouth
and called it man.
Up came the other hand
and God called it woman.
The hands applauded.
And this was no sin.
It was as it was meant to be.

I see them roaming the streets:
Levi complaining about his mattress,
Sarah studying a beetle,
Mandrake holding his coffee mug,
Sally playing the drum at a football game,
John closing the eyes of the dying woman,
and some who are in prison,
even the prison of their bodies,
as Christ was prisoned in His body
until the triumph came.

Unwind hands,
you angel webs,
unwind like the coil of a jumping jack,
cup together and let yourselves fill up with sun
and applaud, world,
applaud.

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The Return to Puerto Vallarte of Benny the Buro

Harvey Jacobs

It is a runny night. Wind blows and the rain falls. I sit growling. My pad is in my hand and the stub of a pencil. Nothing comes. I eat Oreos. Each fattens me. Fat encases me. I will smother under lard at this rate. But they keep me from smoking. If I smoke my lungs will give out.

Where is my collaborator? *I hate her.* Oh, yes, she is with Vonsky. It is Wednesday, isn't it, the hump of the week. And it is her night with the wise bone, the varicose immortal. That bitch. What do I care? She is getting *input* she says without giving output. Without putting out. What a devil. Do I believe her story? Yes, yes. For reasons of need? For reasons of ego? No, no. Because it is true. She is cold as a cube. *Beware, Titanic. Toot your horn in panic. Telegrapher, do not go to sleep. Lifebelts, everybody. Get ready for a salty taste*!

Why do I collaborate with her? She doesn't contribute. I despise her ideas. I hate her attempts at prose. She has no right even to be in the New School. Much less collaborate with me. How did I get into this and for what? Simple. She is beautiful.

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Tantalizing. I cannot stain her. I cannot make her tarnish. She drives me up the walls of empty stadiums. Stadia? Nevertheless.

And she is not human. A Martian. Worse. Everything about her is artificial. She says so herself. Her hair. Her nose. Her titties. Probably even her snatch. She combs her pubic hair. I saw her. She shampoos her thing in Castille. The best. She shaves and annoints herself. She polishes herself. She glows. She is luminous as a shell on the beach in moonlight. Poor old Vonsky. Mr. Input. What is he telling her now? Something about punctuation. Parentheses. Commas. "Dollink, look here on a comma, one of god's despised creatures. Touch it. Breath on it. Accept it. A deformity. A failed line. A road to other roads. Less than nothing. I ask you, Barbara, to love it. Love the comma. Let it wriggle on you. Let it rock on your breast. Take it, know it, feel it inside you, Barbara. A comma. Pet it. See, dollink, the secrets it contains. If det comma could talk, ah, Barbara. If people could talk, what stories they could tell." Fossil fart. Vonsky, the sad bastard. Worldwide fame came to him when he was seventy-eight. What horror. What terror. Worldwide fame when others retire to Miami. Such a thing to live with. And how many Barbaras pecking at his temples? So. He *must* penetrate most. He must lie with them like a piece of withered wheat near melons. Can he still do it? Can he get it up or only dream and take waves of warmth and moisture? He says he is horny as a toad. Would he risk laying naked if he couldn't follow up? An amazing man. A true genius. With that plastic play dough lady teasing his leftovers. Rage makes me shake. What does he need her for? Surely he is on to her by now. Five Wednesdays. *He could be working.* How much time is left? Time. How much time is left for me? I am chubby. My chest makes sounds like Halloween. Age has nothing to do with it. The reaper can come anytime. If I die in her arms, between her legs, what irony. She would roll off me and boil herself. Pig. *I could be writing.* What do I need with her? What fascinates me about her? Synthetic princess. Obsessed with her own chill.

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She came to me as a student. On Tuesdays. At the New School. Tuesdays. When was that? Nearly a year. Amazing. Absolutely beyond belief. She was newly divorced. From whom? Some sad soul in the suburbs. He married her. He married metal. How he must have rattled her seams before he gave her up. He beat her. He left marks but only in hidden places. He was civilized. The marks healed. She would wash off scars. When she came to my class, she was recovering from the experience. When she told me about her wounds, I cried. Not Barbara. I took her long stare for shock. Idiot I was. She was never in shock. Not for an instant.

The first time she came here to my home my parakeet was alive. She cleaned his cage. She wiped up his seeds and washed his water cup. The bird was her enemy. She plotted its destruction. God knows what else she fed it along with its treat. Treat. Millet. And Satan knows what else. I miss my bird. He could not fly well, but he tried. His weight carried him to the floor. Still, he tried. Johnathan Livingston Paraqueet. Where is my bird now? Dead. And she comes here often.

This is a bad thing for my art. I left the classroom to write novels. Not to brood. My money is low and getting lower. Food costs more. The rent will increase. My health fails. And I waste time, time, time. The most precious gift. On her.

And it is impossible. I will never reach her flesh. Mylar. Polyester. Barbara. Android whore. I do everything to her. I do things that strain my heart, my limbs, my insides. Even my mind boggles at positions and thrusts and tangles and pullings and tearings. Her wig laughs at me from the bureau. Her vulnerable nose escapes my swats and crazy kisses. I do and I don't do. Frontwards, backwards, on bottom and atop. I enter tunnels and pay no toll. I visit caves I never knew existed. Nothing is sacred to me, nothing with a door. Still, she is untouched. I cannot reach her.

Collaborate. The nerve. On a children's book. A children's book. What does she know of children, this popsicle person incapable of offering a full nipple to a starving refugee. Benny

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the Buro. See him jump. See Benny the Buro laugh and dance. Why? What? What do I have to do with Benny the Buro or for that matter what has she to do with Benny the Buro? What? Nothing. She knows nothing of Buros, not the faintest beginning. She knows nothing of horse hair or hooves of smell or defecation. Benny the Buro. She is writing with me. Me. And she is illustrating. With pastel drawings that make me nauseous. They make me wince. Flowers with no pistils. A sky with no birds. A sun that smiles. And that Buro—an attempt by Barbara at creating a fuzzy creature, a warm hairy thing for kiddies to love. Disgusting. I work with her twice a week. Twice. Half the time she is here we fornicate. At least I do. Half the time we work. I work.

Once she wrote about a pregnant cosmetic lady, an empire builder, who feared betrayal by her forming fetus. The baby would surely have an ape face and elongated coccyx—the trademark of her family back home—and her own peculiar cross before plastic surgeons hacked at her. It was a good story. The only one. Benny the Buro? Christ save me.

And Vonsky. Of all people. When she told me she heard he was a person who was listed and answered his own telephone I should have known. When she told me she knew a girl who *learned* from him, I laughed. I snickered. When she told me she called and had an appointment to discuss her work—*her work*—I spit and trembled. I felt Vonsky waiting for her, experiencing the tumescence of anticipation. For Barbara? Him, inches from a Nobel Prize?

Tortured soul. How he must have readied himself. Bathed his dentures. Oiled his wrinkled skin. Dusted his typewriter. Swallowed vitamin E and Yerba Matte. Prayed. And when he saw her in his doorway. Yum. That tight body. The long, black hair, perfect, that came from the head of a Korean nine thousand miles away. The pink lips and hands, the dagger fingers, the legs, perfect hanging down from a pelvis that pivoted from no belly. Perfect. The phony nose. Perfect. And the breasts, little hills, perfect spongy pyramids in a brassiere from *Vogue*. How Vonsky must have heard the clock tick.

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International, global, universal fame at seventy-eight. Ugh. Ugh. Ugh. Barbara, smiling, adoring, asking questions in a voice like wind itself of periods and exclamation points and when to use colons and semicolons, Sir? Vonsky stalking her, fighting arthritis, fearing seizure, pressing on with guts and courage and the promise of that girl beside him. Sweet vampire, Vonsky, doing only what he must do to live. I love him and his courage. Dear weed. Beloved father of letters.

And Barbara measuring *input* in proportion to refusing output. Laughing, sipping liquid, touching his cheek, resting a hand on his stringy leg, maybe stroking his headbone or under his chin. Not yet, Vonsky. Later. Him thinking, it takes time to learn that they can love an old man. It takes time. They need time. Giving time to that piece of platinum.

When she came back and laughed, I saw Vonsky in his bed by then looking at the sea of ceiling. Wondering where the night went. Wondering what he told her. She made notes on the bus. Don't worry. And later in her diary. On my bed. She sat naked laughing about what he wanted and how she never did and never would while she made notes on Vonsky's teachings.

Eyes, ears, nose, throat. Bellybutton, cunt, ass and vaccination. And up she pops to make another note in her diary. I am Vonsky then in a fury of delayed appetite, rolling in sand from a broken hourglass, violating all her rooms. Some violation. Some rape. After I am a collapsed bag and she is firm as a wax peach making more notes.

"Runt, tease. How can you do this to such a man?" I scream. "You want me to fuck with him?" says Benny the Buro. "No, never, please, promise me," I say. As a man, as a writer not so good as Vonsky, not internationally famed, not known around the block. "Yes, no," I yell and she writes, ". . . his eyes burned in his skull like two livid coals and I wondered what thoughts flooded the caverns of his cerebrum. As he spoke to me of the joy of words, I felt a joy within." She wrote *that*. That's how my Barbara, my collaborator wrote. In her *diary*. That was truth to her. About Vonsky himself who

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answered his own phone, who hung his number like a worm in the river of the city waiting, starving for some bites. Her medicinal nose pointed down at those words in her book of life and someday I knew she would sell an article on him and his cerebrum. Someday. I knew it like I know my own name. Things happen that way. They do. I must never forget.

It is later than usual. Maybe the Vonsk finally got wise like the coals of his wise eyes. Maybe he ripped off her clothes and had her in the hall. If so, he is dead by now. My girl. His international paws on her. The bastard. The inky bastard. He writes by hand. He never touches the typewriter. Maybe my Barbara is paying her debt to society. She will give herself to become Vonsky's footnote. For the hell of it. For the experience. Some women like ball players. Some, writers.

I hope he is giving it to her like a rusty robot. I am sick. The taste of Oreos fills the caverns of my cerebrum. Also my medulla oblongata and my mouth. I, too, have a cavity. It hurts. The chocolate causes me agony. The cigarette I smoke is stale as the breath of a monster. Barbara, come home. Barbara, keep dry in the wet. Barbara, it is storming. Weirdos walk the city. Tonight Benny the Buro comes home to Puerto Vallarte. You looked forward to his glorious return after such adventures. We planned like babies to write it together. They greet him with garlands. They sing to him with hosannas and maracas or whatever the instrument. The entire town is out for Benny the Buro, Barbara. Hurry here. Vonsky is only after your meat. He lies about asterisks. He finagles with italics. He is biding time, waiting for the man with no shirt to hit the final gong.

Barbara, good news! I came up with a whole new way, an entirely different set of do's, fresh reactions. I have techniques in my mind and words in my heart and steam in my ding-dong and lights in both ears. Where are the turkish towels of yesteryear? I know. I have discovered. Come home.

Dry yourself from this foul weather. Be naked, or nude as you call it. Write in your diary. Have a glass of wind. Wind. I meant to say wine. A glass of wind then Benny the Buro will

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return to Puerto Vallarte on five legs and I will make you *feel* something.

I *will*. I *promise*. I *insist*.

Come home. Vonsky speaks, all membranes vibrating. "Don't go, dollink. Rest. Relax. Let me say to you that the pages of a book are like so many wiggling legs, eager each to grasp and hold a flower. Flower, take some refreshment, a cookie, a piece of cake. Every letter in every word has a sensual existence. Take the S. The S is a snake; but don't be afraid. The I is a sword. Dollink, this is no kind of night for you to be in transit. Rest. Relax. Take to eat. I'll sit here by you. Does this room have a fireplace? Sure, dollink. Me. Honey, student, open mind, sound body, one thing I can tell you. Venus needs her penis. Yah? You didn't know what I'm telling you?"

S for snake. R for rolling viscera. Barbara. Hurry. Buro is spelled with *two* r's. I know, darling, I know. I was saving the corrections for a *nice surprise*.

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Gregory Orr

DOMESTIC LIFE

1 Today

Open yourself up: today
that's no different than opening
a refrigerator door: large chunks
of meat, eggs
scattered on the metal racks,
and cowering in the back:
a tiny, frightened woman.
You are huge and clumsy;
you fumble for her, breaking
all the eggs, and she eludes you,
and you don't feel a thing
except cold inside.

2 At Home

You feel heavy and sad as though
someone was building a mound
of animal skulls inside you.
Wanting to cry,
you hold your head in your hands;
no tears fall, but even so
when you lift your head
the table is covered
with white snails of kleenex.

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3 Before Dawn

Your wife left before you woke.
She scratched a note on your back;
you try to read it with mirrors.

You decide to talk to the cat,
but when you open your mouth
butterflies and honey-colored
wasps fly out.

The blood in the light bulbs
burns less brightly.

4 The Waterfall

Failing to hold on to things,
a man can become
a waterfall. His friends
stare, silent and aghast,
as he disappears
over the cliff, carrying
off his books, his wife,
all his furniture.

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5 Fall Cleaning

This morning, the almost weightless bodies
of dead insects drift down
from the ceiling. It's seasonal;
you have to expect that sort of thing
when you live in a burrow under the earth.
Yesterday a package arrived
in the mail; it contained bird beaks
in assorted colors and sizes.
Some are small like yellow thorns,
but others are larger;
I slip those over my fingers,
clack them together and dance
around the room in my gray bathrobe.
The insects revive. I am their god.
They dance after me up the tunnel
and out into the autumn woods.

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Three Poems by Tom Disch

ON READING SHELLEY

I have a feeling that I will not die
For quite some time. Only poets with a kind
Of supererogatory strength of mind,
A too intensely wrought intensity
Of nightmare Life-in-Thought, will prophecy
Abrupt abbreviation to their blind
Careers. I envy them and cannot find
Any comfort in my own uncertainty.
Oh, I would love to know, the way they knew!—
Brides swooning in the momentary fear
Of the bridegroom's hand on the handle of the door,
To live, like them, in a dissolving view
Of waves and clouds advancing to the shore.

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THE PRISONERS

Our hostess, while our host went down to get
A better pair of manacles, would spit
At us, and joke, and pass potato chips.
The clamps upon our nipples and our lips
Were loosened when the children went to bed;
Then we could be ridiculed and fed
A week's accumulation of the rinds
Of English cheeses, while they spoke their minds
About U.S. responsibility
In Viet Nam. At last they set us free,
Expressing hope we might in time come back
To have our teeth pulled and enjoy the rack.

A NOTE FROM YOUR JAILER

I am this haunting music. Never look
Beneath the mask. There is a monster there—
Oh yes! And yet an inch or two below that
seeming,
Under the raddled flesh and slightly too
Prominent teeth, my spiritual self
Is hard at work, is indefatigably yielding
You these treasures of its inwardness.
In time I'm sure you'll really like me.
Listen, darling! I am playing Bach!

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Jay Boyer

UNNATURAL ACTS AND MENAGERIE

for Diane

It's gone about far enough,
your being kind to animals.
I've had a belly full.
I've kissed my last frog.
I've lent the secret
of my success
to the last stray cheetah.
As it is
we live on peanuts,
you're driving us to rags,
you're loving to a fault.

I'm fed up
with making pen pals
of turtles.
This impulse of yours,
I can't explain,
this drive to confide
in puffins or learn Chinese
from the gulls,
it'll have to go.

It's positively backward,
chasing cars with your spaniels,
throwing pots
with cats, your guppies,
they get on my nerves.
I've done my part, Lord knows:
made your teal my broker,

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crashed on the tips he slipped me,
called his sister
when her husband went blooey.
Didn't I lunch with your friends
the seals? Shrimp and flounder
make me sick, I thought you ought to know.

Oh, let them be our guests then,
I don't care.
I'll play the role.
With your ducks I'll dance
the polka dot waddle.
When the seals come
roll out the horns.
I'll do that much
but not much more.
Don't go renting us
a platypus,
or taking in a moose,
I'll call it quits,
I swear I will.

Though I confess
I'd miss you some, unnatural
acts and menagerie,
bad times and worldly wise,
I've always loved your ocelot.

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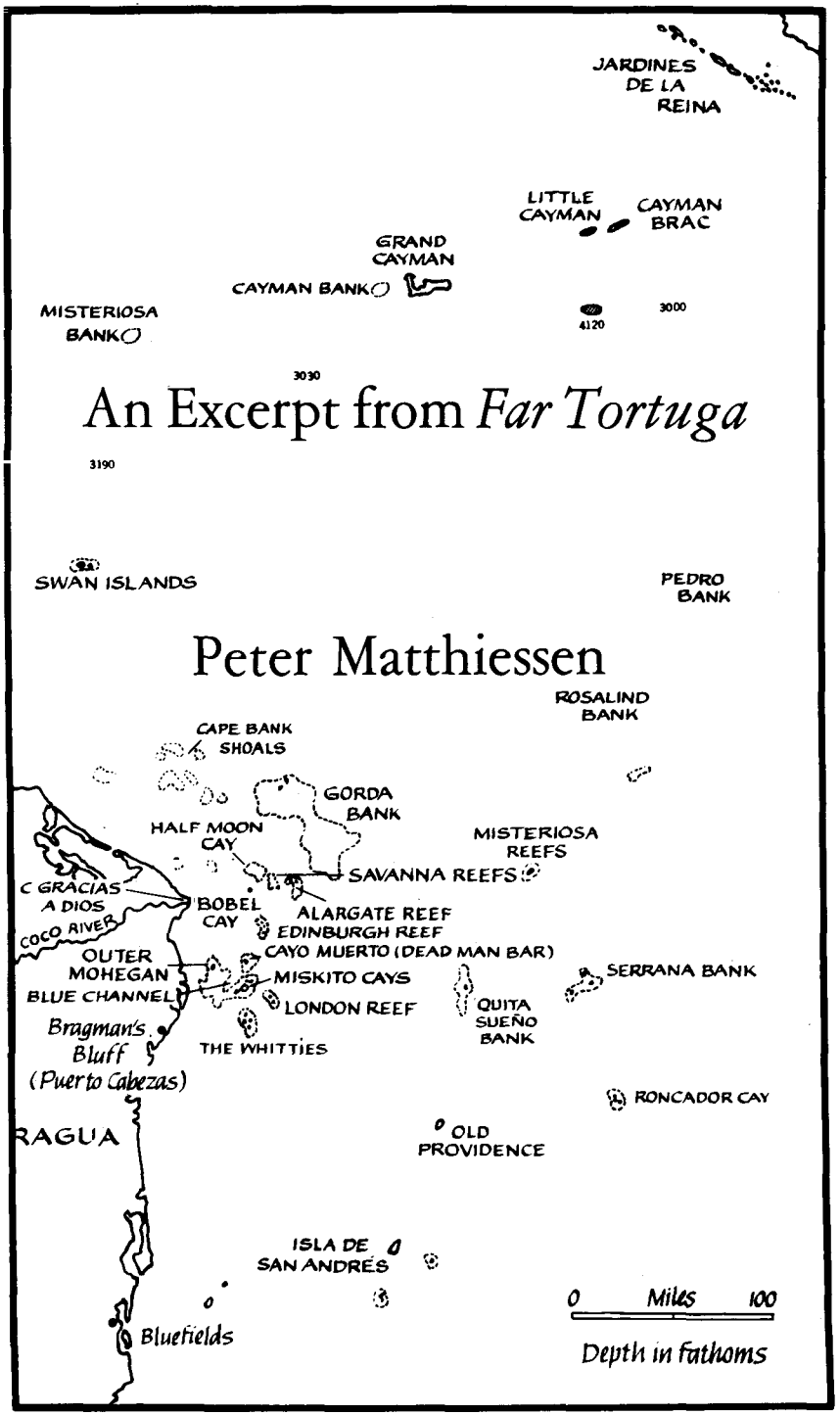

Endpaper map from Far Tortuga

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First light.

A black lump on the black horizon.

Athens! ATHENS! Buddy, run back dere and tell de helm to head her off de wind another point. If he were not asleep, he could had seen dat landfall for hisself!

One day dat Athens gone wake up in de grave.

Bobel Cay.

Look dere! A vessel!

Against the cay a white shape rises. Raib turns from the rail as Buddy reappears.

Athens! ATHENS! (*to Buddy*) Run back and tell de helm we changin course! Sout-sou'east!

Copm Raib? Copm Raib? Must be Desmond's vessel! Copm Andrew aboard of dere! Your own doddy! Don't want to speak him?

Raib turns a mean stare on Vemon, who steps backward and salutes. The crewmen laugh. Raib's chin juts and he starts to speak, then stops. He gazes at his men.

You want to lose another day? All right, den. BUDDY!

* * *

In the gray light, a yacht, decrepit. Her varnished cabin sides are patchy and her white hull is stained with rust; her after deck, under a torn flapping canopy, is littered with cartons and refuse. A few turtles, unprotected from the sun, are scattered on the main deck, forward. Old auto tire fenders from her last

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port hang along her sides, and rust, barnacles and algae crust her water line. On her bows, large eyes are crudely painted, and on her stern is the name

DAVY JONES

Yawning and scratching, her men drift to the rail. One pisses into the gray water.

Call *dat* a turtle boat, in dese domned days!

The *Eden*, coming alongside, settles heavily against her fenders; her crewman take the *Eden*'s lines. The two crews nod in greeting but do not call out; all watch the *Eden*'s captain.

Raib stands, feet spread, at his own rail, which lies below that of Desmond's vessel.

What dem eyes for? Desmond need dat to find turtle?

What say dere, Copm Raib? Come up, mon! Come aboard de yacht!

Call dat a yacht, huh? Copm Andrew dere?

Yah, mon! come up!

A silence as the *Eden*'s engines are shut down. Wind, and a wash of sea along the hull. From Bobel comes bird shriek and the thud of surf on the shore to windward; the daybreak sky takes on a silver shine. On the north point of the cay, a fire darts and shudders in the wind. There figures gather in one mass and break apart again.

Raib remains standing at the rail, feet wide apart.

He can't come to de rail? Copm ANDREW! (*pause*) Can't hear me den?

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Yah, mon. He hearin you good. Settin right dere. But he ain't talkin.

Goddom it—

Hurt his heart, jumpin out de catboat. Rough weather, y'know, and de rails is high. Must be he shamed of hurtin hisself, cause he won't talk no more.

Raib swings onto the deck of the *Davy Jones*.

Andrew Avers is dressed in neat faded khakis and high black shoes and a round-topped thatch hat, and he is seated in a rough chair knocked together out of boards which stick up behind his head. In his lap is a sun-whitened conch shell, cupped ceremonially in both freckled hands. Under the clear gaze of his father, Raib starts to speak, then stops, and makes no move toward him.

Catboat? Goddom it, to bring a man dat is eighty years of age—DESMOND!

Ain't aboard, Copm Raib. Desmond spend de night dere on de cay with dem Jamaicans. (*winks*) Dey got rum and pussy over dere, but Desmond say he go dere to talk *business*.

Throw dat boat overboard! I goin ashore!

The crews watch Speedy and Buddy row the Captain toward the beach.

In a ruined copse on the high ground of the cay, a litter of tin and broken glass gives off a weak reflection of the distant fire. Here and there on the spears and stumps a sea bird poises, wings held high over its back; the shrieking birds lift away on the dawn wind which blows through the broken sea wood unimpeded. Striking the first sun rays, overhead, the sharp wings turn from gray to white: the terns beat forward, stroking hard

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against the wind to remain above the head of the intruder.

The dry smell of bird guano floats lightly on a pall of human excrement. Placing his bare feet carefully, Raib spits out his breath in bursts. The smooth track of a hawksbill turtle, with prints made by flippers and hind feet, leads up above the tide line, where the turtle has pushed aside torn purslane and trash to dig her nest.

The sand spit on the north end of the cay: a dead fire, and flimsy wind breaks built from the killed trees. Here ragged forms are crowded.

On the open beach, two figures copulate and a third sits hunched up like a fetus. His ragged shorts are tangled at his knees, and his hands are bloody; he is cradling his stomach. He croons slowly in bewilderment. Noticing Raib, he blinks, then scowls, but the scowl gives way to a yip of pain. In an effort to spit toward the copulating man he fails; the weak spit bubbles.

Boog son-bitch cut me. Oh, I dyin now, mon. Oh, I dyin.

The copulating man and the man dying wear small street hats.

On hands and knees a black, thick-bodied girl stares at the sand. Her ragged shift is up around her waist. Because of her big belly, the man has mounted her from behind; except for his street hat and a pair of ragged shorts hung on one ankle, he is naked. A knife glints by his hand. His ear is pressed to the girl's back, as if he were listening for the life in her. One hand clutches her right breast, the other a bottle of *aguardiente* that is stuck into the sand at her left side. Heavily he fucks her, stops a while, then fucks again.

The girl lowers her right arm to the sand while keeping her buttocks high. With her left hand, she reaches back and wrenches at the bottle and drags it forward, but before she can drink, she loses track. Slowly the bottle falls.

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The fluid leaks onto the sand.

Raib rights the bottle. The girl raises her hand as if to brush sand from her eyes but does not complete the gesture; the hand falls back. She lowers both forearms to the sand and rests her cheek upon her hands, her mouth forced into odd disfigurement.

On the lee side, in stained shallows, wavelets lift melted labels, floating feces, a pale plastic bottle. In the offal is the bobbing head of a green turtle; its shell and guts are scattered on the sand. Another turtle lies upright on the beach, facing inland. Its flippers are bound and its great weight, unsupported, slowly smothers it. When Raib turns it on its back, it blinks, gasping its ancient sea sound, and sand grains falling from its lids stick in the fluids from its eye.

Leaves and twigs on the broken bushes do not blow in the same direction, but fly in tumult. The dawn sky is swelling with the light, but the sun at the horizon is hidden by a squall line of black clouds moving fast toward the south. The squalls emerge from a dark place in a towering mass of gray. With rising light, the bird shriek mounts, piercing the sea boom to the eastward.

In the new sun, a fish as thin as light flips back and forth over a round green leaf of sea grape. Again the playing fish arcs out of the water, flashing its silver side, its eye a bright black spot.

Raib stands stone still. On a coral rock protruding from the sand, a bleeding-tooth snail budges, and a ghost crab, half hidden, observes him.

A tern's white feather, blowing.

In the beach vine, illuminated leaves spin, dark and pale and dark. Leaf shadows turn in the early light. A floret of purple morning-glory, blowing.

The sea, breathing. The fish leaps into the air.

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the fish leaps into the air

the fish leaps into the air

the fish leaps into the air

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On the corner of the beach a man with neck scars sits alone, facing the east. Raib's bare feet are silent on the sand. The man's legs are crossed, and a cigarette hangs from the center of his mouth.

The big head bent over the rum bottle is balding and the neck is scarred and tight whorls of sweated hair mat the swart back. The man wears black rubber boots splashed with red paint, and ragged shorts from which his penis hangs out in a tatter.

The black clouds are afire; at the spine of the beach the broken bushes glow and blacken. On the windward shore, the ocean pours across a wave-washed bench of coral, lashing the islet with white dragon tails.

Desmond!

In silhouette against the sun Raib stands motionless, wind curling the frayed edges of his hat.

Desmond Eden nods a little, struggles to rise, sits back again, off balance. He grins, shaking his head; he offers rum to Raib's silhouette, shielding his black glasses from the sun.

Raib does not move. By his feet, a ghost crab glides away on knife toes, stalked eyes taut, making delicate thin curved slashes in the sand.

Slowly Desmond removes his glasses. His gritty face is poor in color, not bearded but unshaven, with broken eyebrows and a heavy mouth. His left eye seems to protrude; he looks lop-sided. He gazes at Raib, bloodshot, then returns the dark glasses to his face.

Oh, dat sun wild, mon.

Raib is silent.

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Oh, dat sun *wild*, mon. Hurt my eye.

Noon.

Raib and Desmond face each other at the rails.

A cigarette butt stirs, shifts, blows across the deck, coming to rest against the shoe of the old man in the chair.

Desmond points.

Byrum Watler of your own crew heard de talk dat mornin in West Bay, right under dem big grape trees by de church.

Dass right. I was—

Goddom it, I talkin to *you*, not Byrum—

Well, best let Byrum tell it, Copm Raib, so's you believe it.

Well, we was settin on de boats under de grape trees, lookin out over de West Bay beach and down toward de sout'ward. And Desmond were settin sail dat mornin time, bound for de Cays. And Copm Andrew look kind of sorrowful dere, and he say to us, Dommit, boys, every day I settin idle is costin me ten years off my life! So den I told him dat he was lookin very well in his appearance, and dat prob'ly he could sail again as pilot, bein dat he was so well instructed about de sets. And Copm Andrew noddin away dere.

Goddom it, Byrum, you just de mon to stir de pot!

Byrum ignores him.

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Well, Copm Andrew say, dey many things dat I have learned dat now has left me, but not what I learned out dere in de Miskita Cays. In de fifty-five years dat I was at it, my memory is just as fresh on dat today. Says, I can still do what people knew dat I was capable of doin, cause I can lay down dere in my daughter's house at any minute dat I want and picture dose sets just as natural as if I had used dem yesterday, and all de courses, too, and if I went out at it today, I would be no stranger.

Desmond winks at Byrum.

Dass it! De very words! And den he say, I couldn't be as active in de boat as what I was!

Pity he didn't think of dat before he sailed!

Copm Raib, he were willin to go for nothin, but I signed him up for a half-share. He needed to go, and I needed a pilot—

Raib spins in a complete circle, stamping a foot hard on the deck.

Half share! Copm Andrew Avers! *Dat* be your little way! Wait till I gone away down to Honduras, and den to sneak in dere—God DOMN it! NEVER HEARD ABOUT A STROKE? (*points at the chair*) MAYBE YOU GOT HIM CRIPPLED UP FOR GOOD! MAYBE NOW HE SOME KIND OF A IDIOT!

Panting, he stops short. The men stare at the still figure in the chair, who seems to smile.

No, mon! Copm Andrew say, I ain't dyin in no hospital, I gone die here on de turtle banks. And dem were de last

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words dat he spoke.

Thin tern cries, over wind and water. To the east, in the white haze of the horizon, squall shadow and a broken shard of rainbow.

You got no business with him, Desmond.

Licking his teeth, Desmond spreads his hands and gazes at soiled fingernails. He checks the wind, the sky; he sighs.

Maybe you right dere, Copm Raib. I think you best take Copm Andrew on de *Eden*, so he be with his rightful son.

Desmond grins ferociously at Athens, who suppresses a hoot. When Desmond speaks again, his voice is hard.

Rig dat chair to de block and fall and swing it over.

Desmond's men rig a sling under the chair seat and hook it to a pulley. They remove the old man's palm hat and tuck it beneath the old white conch. The chair is hoisted high over their heads, and Andrew Avers, swung outboard by the boom, rides back and forth between the vessels. Over his head, the blue sky fades in a film of white; there are tints of pink and green.

Raib makes a thick ugly sound, stops, clears his throat and speaks.

So dass de way you sneakin out of what you done, and knowin we just commenced dis turtle voyage, with no bunk for dat poor old fella, and no stores sufficient—

Raib stops speaking. Desmond's hand has stayed the boom. Over their heads, the old man sways with the rise and fall.

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Don't want your doddy, Copm Raib? Dat what you sayin?

The ships lurch and the chair spins and unwinds again on the rope bridle. Captain Andrew, hands upon his conch, turns west, south, and north. In the wind, old white shank glistens between faded trousers and a pair of high black shoes warped up at the toes. As its arc increases, the chair gains momentum; the white hair flies. Unblinking, the old man circles, as clouds move up behind black skeins of rigging.

Raib grabs for the whirling chair but cannot hold it; he is dragged against the rail. Desmond takes the guy line from a crewman and eases the chair down to the *Eden*'s deck.

Raib is panting. Desmond laughs.

Keep de chair, Copm Raib! No charge for dat!

We settle dis motter another day, Desmond!

I be waitin on your convenience, Copm Raib!

BROWN! START DEM ENGINES! CAST US OFF, DERE!

Desmond winks at Byrum.

Where you bound for, Desmond?

Can't go turtlin without a pilot, Byrum. Get a few shark maybe, some salt fish. Bird eggs. Maybe I pick up some dese Jamaica boys (*points toward beach*) down around de cays, corry dem over to de land of opportunity.

You still in dat game, huh?

Know something better? (*shrugs*) I guess I be goin on dis

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way forever so. Where you headed, Byrum?

Southern cays, I venture. De season late. If de turtle gone, we work offshore—Misteriosa. Know dat place?

Desmond yawns.

Copm Andrew marked it careful on my chart. Long way out dere, mon. Bad reefs.

Dat so? Well, we desperate.

Plenty egg birds dere, Copm Andrew say.

Birds, mon! And trees! Ain't one dese old mangrove banks, y'know! (*whispers*) He got de idea dat some green turtle goes out dere to nest.

Dey plenty birds dere anyways, you know dat much.

Talkin about birds? Oh, mon! De sky is littered!

Desmond grins so suddenly that Byrum flinches.

You been out dere, Byrum?

No, mon! But I knows about it good!

HOW ABOUT HIS GEAR? HIS KNIFE DERE? AND HIS SHARE OF DE CATCH? YOU KEEPIN DAT?

I like to, Copm Raib, but you too smart for me.

And old duffel is slung down to the *Eden*, and three turtle are transferred. Desmond tosses a big old-fashioned knife to Raib, blade first; Raib dodges it, and the heavy blade gouges the deck.

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You kind to speak us, Copm Raib! Bye, Copm Andrew! Hear me dere? Goodbye, old mon!

DUE SOUTH AND STEADY!

STEAD-DAY!

LASH DAT DOMN CHAIR TO DE MAST, FORE HE ROLL OVER!

Due south and steady.

From the chair lashed to the mast, the old man can observe Raib's approach.

Raib whispers.

Copm Andrew? Can't talk to me, Papa? (*pause*) Can't ye hondle yourself, den?

Beneath the thatch hat, the eyes in the brown skull are round and bright, and the mouth is firm. The old man is not absent and not present; he seems intent on a voice calling from a distance.

You had too much ambition, Papa. To sail with dat goddom mongrel fella—

The old hands twitch on the white conch.

Raib falls silent. He turns his back upon his father, gazing all around the empty sky.

* * *

Sharks, mon! See dat cobber knife? Off de port bow—wait, dey down behind de wave—dere! Up again! See something white? *Big* sharks, mon!

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something white? *Big* sharks, mon!

something white! Run tell de helm to head her south a little till we see

Raib climbs the masthead as the engines slow.

Copm Raib?

You see it, Copm Raib?

Copm Raib?

Beneath the surface, off to port, a pale shape seems to grow, gathering and unfolding, lifting and falling on the sparkling swells. Sharks circle at a little distance; dark fins flop wearily in shining seas. As the ship nears, the fins withdraw beneath the surface. The pale shape turns as the ship passes, and long shark shadows loom and fade.

Because the *Eden* is broadside to the seas, she is riding heavily, and Raib's figure, high in the rigging, is black on the veering sun.

Raib? Copm Raib?

—still see it?

Copm Raib—!

—dead whale, I said!

Dead whale? Ten fathom long? How come dem sharks goin round and round, and never touchin it!

Was *you* up on de masthead, Byrum? You see it better den me? DEAD WHALE, I SAID!

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horizon

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Let's hustle, now! We got to set net right after we eat! Buddy? Dat food ready? Den give his plate to Copm Andrew!

He won't eat, Papa! Just takes a little water!

Dat his business! But you got to give de mon de choice!

The men stop talking. Buddy carries a tin plate from the galley and extends it to the motionless old man. In the noon sun, as the chair rolls, the shadow of the foremast boom crosses the freckled hands, which make no move. Buddy sets the plate on his lap.

See him watchin? See dat? He can talk, okay, I *know* dat he can talk—he just don't want to.

When the oars and masts are passed down to the pilots and stacked on top of the fishing gear, the men come back aboard. Wodie serves large white tin plates of rice and johnnycake, with coffee, and a platter of salt barracuda on the side.

Papa?

His father regards him briefly without answering, then turns to Will.

You begin on de south side of de white hole dere, and work back up into de north. Don't bring none dem net back here; you just sot'm all along dat reef out dere!

Papa?

And reef dem sails! Can't corry sail like dat out dere, not *dis* afternoon, darlin!

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Will leads Athens and Vernon into the port boat; Raib, Byrum and Speedy jump into the starboard boat. Brown squats upon his fuel drum, toes curled over the rim, and Wodie climbs to the galley roof.

Mon, dat wind really cuttin now!

Can I go in de boat, Papa?

You think you can pull dat oar out dere? (*shakes his head*) Boy, I know you try, but trying ain't de same as doin. You keep de fire burnin in de stove and see to de wants of Copm Andrew—dat be your portion.

We see you later, Buddy!

Let go de line, boy!

Rudders are rigged, and the starboard boat drifts astern. Byrum and Speedy step the mast as the boat tosses; the sail canvas snaps and ripples. The port boat, already free, beats cross wind on a northerly tack. In the glittering green trough, its gaff-rigged sail falls and rises.

Now the starboard boat heels away downwind. Warm spray flies over the bow, and the crew leans outboard; she comes about and heads up toward the reef, close to the wind. Raib is shouting.

Dass de way you know a fine sailin boat, boys—de way she beat to windward when you slack off on de sheet!

A mile away, well short of the reef, the port boat has dropped her sail.

What de hell Will doin?

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Raib jumps up in the flying boat.

What? Goddom! God*dom* it! I never think he be as poor as dat! I make'm take'm up, dass all, and sot again settin at shadders, way out dere!

sailin to dese reefs all de days of his life, and den he go and set his net out dere—dat mon can't learn nothin from de sea. Dat mon

what Copm Andrew used to say: Old Bush people can't learn nothin from de sea

put de old mon in dat boat as pilot. JESUS! If he deaf and dumb, he *still* do a better job den Will, he *still* do it!

The brown sail flutters aloft again; the port catboat has seen Raib's signals. She gathers speed, bending away toward the reefs.

He ain't pickin up dem net! Dem five, six nets is wasted!

I made a bad mistake when I call dat mon a pilot. I done a bad job *dere*.

No turtle out dat way, huh?

Well, he might have de luck to snag one comin and goin, cause green turtle out dere in de *day*. Dey out dere grazin on de sponges and de sea grass. But in de twilight dey go up under de reef. Ain't no turtle in de world gone to spend de night out dere amongst de grasses.

The blue boat drifts in the green sea, in twenty feet of water. In the lee of the reef, the water clears. Dark coral heads gather; they loom and sink away.

Green turtle, mon! See dem two dere? Dem two big bastard dere lookin to coot! Dey gettin set to go down to

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de Bogue!

Ain't no chicken turtle on *dis* reef, dass what Capm Allie say!

Strike dat sail, Byrum, take de bow oar! Stay dere amidships, Speedy!

The catboat is rowed against the wind, from set to set—lone coral heads, narrow reef channels, round wells of white sand ringed by coral, called "white holes." Between sets, Raib rigs the next net to its buoy and clears the kelleck and the buoy line, so that it is ready to heave. With hands, toes and teeth, he spreads the whole length of the net to be sure it is hung properly and will not tangle, then heaves the kelleck on its line and throws the net out after it, using an overarm motion that casts the mesh wide in the air. One end of each net is secured to the log buoy of light wood, and this end is anchored by the kelleck. The net floats down the current like an underwater flag, shifting position with the change in tides: it is borne up by small floats along the surface line, and since the bottom is not weighted it hangs in the current at an angle. With its wide mesh, the light net encourages tangling, yet permits the turtle to haul it to the surface when it has to breathe.

De onliest thing, Speedy, when a small turtle hang up too close to de kelleck, and got to drag *dat* to de top every time he breathe, why den you go out dere in de mornin time and find dat turtle drownded.

The boat works north along the reef, setting the channels and the edges of the jagged pan shoals that hide just below the surface; the coral walls of the shoals and channels descend steeply to white coral sand.

Easy on de bow oar, Byrum! Pull best, Speedy!

Speedy chatters to himself.

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Hear dat, Speedy? You too, Speedy! Pull best, Speedy-Boy, you doin fine!

In the western light, the coral glows like fire. A shark glides out from the dark wall, then accelerates with a stroke of its huge caudal. Farther on, bonita zigzag in pursuit of bait fish; where the bonita chop the surface, the minnows spray into the air in silver showers, all across the sunlit coral.

Byrum, grunting, rests a moment on his oars.

Dis de onliest place I ever see bonita on de inside of de reef. And dey jack dere—jack crevalle!

Keep her head up, Byrum. Pull best, darlin. You take a rest in dis wind, mon, she walk away from you right back down to de vessel.

The sprays of bait fish, catching the sun, have drawn the hunting terns, which beat along against the wind, just overhead. Fish and birds chase back and forth across the catboat's bow, the tern shriek lost in the cavernous booming on the reef.

Where dem birds *come* from, way out here? How dey know dat bait was dere?

Dat what dey call *mystery*, Byrum. Dat is *mystery*. Many's de time I seen dem noddies on de Cayman Banks, not ten mile west of de island, and egg birds with'm, and boobies. And not one of dem thousands of birds ever comes in sight of Grand Cayman.

The ship swings on her anchor. The catboats are drifted aft on lines of different lengths so that they will not collide or bang the hull.

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Vemon! Get your ass out o dat deckhouse! Don't you see dese other mens workin—dey ain't none of dem dat is drier den you! When de work is finish and de deck secure, *den* you tend to your own self!

Hear dat? Now come out dere, Vemon!

Huh! Call yourself mate, and den you—

I say, Come *out* dere, Vemon!

I *comin*, goddom it, Will!

When de Coptin change he clothes, den we know dat our day's work be done, and we change too! Dat be de rule of de sea!

Both gangs are wet, and at twilight the wind is cool; they change their pants while Wodie and Buddy cook their supper.

I said, Move his chair in under de roof dere, case it rains!

* * *

Twilight.

The wind relents a little, but thick waves rumble on the reef, and the sea gnaws the hull.

See dat silver light, dere? Make me sad, someway.

Gloomy, mon. What de old people calls de Mouth of de Night. Cause de night hungry, mon.

Boom. The sea expires. *Boom*.

Feel like dat reef *watchin* me someway. Feel like it waitin.

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Athens, mon, you gettin worse den Wodie dere.

How about yourself? Always talkin about dat big old shark out dere—how you know he de same one, Byrum? How you *know* dat?

Cause I *seen*'m! Got a big notch in de fin!

Dey some things a mon don't have to see, but he know it all de same, cause he feelin de sign.

Hush up, Wodie.

* * *

Darkness.

Copm? We seen dat same white mess again! Risin and fallin on de far side o de reef!

Raib glares at Will in warning.

Dem old dead shrimps?

Copm Raib? Copm Raib? Dat mess must be alive! Either-wise by now it would have fetched up on de coast. Wouldn't be foller'n us around out here.

Dem sharks still with it?

I TOLD YOU, COPM RAIB, ON DE WINDWARD SIDE! HOW IN DE HELL COULD WE SEE FINS IN DAT MESS OUT DERE!

Will, why you answer me in dat big voice? I ask a mon if he see sharks, and he—

NO brother! All we seen was dat same awful-lookin

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white, risin and fallin on de horizon!

Must be alive. Or else de currents—

Maybe dey *two* of dem—

Silence.

Maybe it got business with us.

Now nemmine dat, Wodie! Nemmine dat duppy talk! We ain't gone to speak no more about dis motter!

A heavy slosh along the hull. Spars creaking.

twenty-five, dis goddom wind

East wind.

* * *

Edinburgh Reef.

In the gray light, the leaky boats are half submerged in wave water and rain. Wind blowing hard, and wind banks to the eastward.

The turtles grow restless with the coming of the light and struggle to reach the open sea: sometimes they escape, or tear the nets as they drag them across the coral. Therefore the cat-boats are off before dawn to draw the nets.

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Gray sea, gray sunrise: a cold silver light.

. . . not *dis* mornin!

Will sot dis reef with me and another time with Copm Teddy! A mon dat has worked turtle all de days of his life, and still he sot way out here stead of goin up into de reef! And de goddom fool tellin me he fishin *spots*!

He settin at shadders, like I said . . .

Dis is an *hombre*, dis is! Sign him on as mate, and den he go . . .

Near the reef, the catboat heads up into the wind, sail snapping. Byrum lashes the sail around the mast, then lowers the mast into the boat.

See dat one flouncin on de weather side? And dere and dere—dey two in dat other net!

Green turtle, Speedy-Boy! Green turtle!

Speedy, dass a goddom log'red you pointin at, but dat one a turtle over dere.

Log'red ain't turtle?

Log'red ain't no kind of turtle at all! I guess you might say it in de turtle family, dat's about all—dommit, take dat oar into de boat once you got hold of de net! Can't hondle turtle with no oar stickin out like dat!

No use gettin excited, Copm Raib! Dis boy doin okay for a new fella.

I not excited! I just likes to hustle!

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Sometimes a mon hustle too much, lose more time dat way.

Now dass enough, Byrum! I never come out on dese reefs dis mornin to take lessons about turtlin from *you*!

The nets trail downwind from the reef, the float lines bunched up here and there in a rude tangle; the turtles thrash and sigh. As the catboat comes up on the net, the creatures sound, dragging the floats beneath the sea, but they are tired and soon surface.

Raib hooks the net with a small grapnel and hauls it in. Each crewman seizes a fore flipper of the turtle. They hoist it upright, facing away from the boat, then haul it on its back over the gunwales. It rests on the thwart until freed of the net, then it is lowered, still upside down, into the bilges.

Look like Will got turtle after all! Green turtle! See de pale belly comin up over de side?

Raib jams the turtle under the th

Nemmine Will's turtle, mind your job! Can't corry no turtle in dis boat, you don't stow dem better dan dat! Don't take two men to do what you doin dere, just take one dat knows his job!

You sayin I don't know my job?

If you was on de *A.M. Adams*, you had ought to knowed dat de Coptin never come up into de bow dis way if de two men know dere job!

You right dere. But—

All right, *I* de Coptin *dis* mornin! Dey ain't nothin in de

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world you can teach me about turtles! (*more quietly*) If de men know dere duty, dey see de motter through dereselves.

You sayin I don't know my duty?

Now dass enough, I said!

There are five green turtle in the nets, each one two hundred pounds or more, and the broad calipees of bamboo yellow cover the bottom of the catboat. When first taken aboard, the turtles slap their flippers on their bellies; soon they lie still.

Where dat easternmost net? I sot it right off de edge of dat pan shoal!

Goddom log'red bearin it away, dat's what it is! Look where he got it!

The catboat drifts down on the last net, which floats on the surface in a snarl. The huge loggerhead is wound inside it, wound so tightly that it cannot sound as the catboat nears; its small eye glowers through the netting. It is dragged into the catboat to be disentangled, and soon the massive head is freed, but the taut net and the beast's great weight make the job difficult in the small boat. The men move gingerly around the head, with its pink warty neck.

Goddom it, we best take dis sonofabitch back to de vessel, h'ist'm up, work on him dere! We be all mornin out here, and dere Will back down to de ship already!

* * *

Byrum slings the boat painter to Buddy and draws the catboat alongside; it heaves and bangs. Raib swings onto the deck.

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Buddy? Did Copm Andrew eat?

Buddy shakes his head.

* * *

One by one, the turtles are hoisted from the catboats by means of a bridle secured to the bases of the fore flippers. Suspended from the tackle at the tip of the foremast boom, they are swung inboard over the rails. Athens grabs the heavy tail of a hanging male, to steady it, then pierces its flippers with a red poker brought from the fire in the galley stove: a hissing sound and a quick sweet stink of flesh. The turtle blinks. Then it is lowered to the deck, where palm thongs are run through the flipper holes, and the flippers are lashed tight across the belly.

> . . . big fella here hatched from de egg and come up out of de sand dere at Turtle Bogue and feel dat water and run for de sea fore something get'm; after dat, he disappear. And in all de years since, ain't nobody knows where dat old turtle been until de time we seen him flouncin out dere off dat pan shoal.
>
> Green turtle very mysterious, mon.
>
> Green turtle, mon.

Wodie slides the turtles aft, into the shade of the starboard companionway. Since they will be transferred to a crawl at Miskito Cay, they are left abovedecks. To keep them from sliding in rough seas, Wodie kicks wedges under the shells and a wood pillow is placed beneath each head, which would otherwise hang back unsupported.

The starboard boat has landed five green turtle, the port boat four greens and a hawksbill. Will's shy smile is warped by his tobacco plug.

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You done as good as we done, mate, settin at shadders!

I fishin spots, Byrum, like I said.

Byrum, dere was another green we lost to sharks! Still layin on de bottom with no head on'm and fins off. And dere were dat many sharks going around dere, and big ones!—I tellin you, it made my blood run cold!

* * *

In the port companionway, the old man sits upright in the shadows. Behind him lie the turtles. Their mouths are closed and their breath infrequent, as in the sea, and the expiration, when it comes, is a hollow gasping.

A turtle sips air and subsides again. Its weary sigh, and the tears of lubricating fluid that squeeze regularly from its eye, go unnoticed except by Wodie, who pauses now and then to adjust the headrests; the other men step on and over the bound, silent creatures as if they were part of the ship's gear.

* * *

Weather changin, look like.

Weather changin, but not de wind. If dis were not de month of April, I tellin you I would be lookin for sign of hurricane. (*shakes his head*) When de stars shootin straight down into de wind, to de horizon—dat's okay. But last night I seen stars shootin *across*—y'know? Cuttin right across de horizon. And dat makes me scared.

What do dat mean?

Raib bangs the wheel housing.

Wind, mon, WIND!

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In Roatan, we lookin for a ring around de sun. In de Bay Islands. Ring around de sun and ring around de moon.

The Captain nods.

One telltale thing for a hurricane, you feel de wind pullin toward de north or de northwest. Course dere are regular northwest storms, but dat is in de winter time. Usually from July, August, September, October, anytime dat wind goes to de north, dere trouble comin.

Yah, mon. A north wind in September, mon, you better not stop dere askin questions, cause dat is *hurricane*.

Sometimes you can see a half-circle, cloudy—

Raib draws his arm in a half-circle over the horizon.

Yah. De old people call it a hard sky. Squally tropical storm a-blowing. De squall from a hurricane, will not be long fore it will sort of break up in its pass over. But fore it gets cleared up good, you will see another squall formin, and each time it blowin a little harder. (*sighs*) I never forgot dat hurricane in 1926, how de people was standin by dere door dere lookin to windward. I never forgot how dem people looked when dat hurricane come down—dey looked like *children*. De people stood dere in dere door lookin to windward at dat awful sky, and dere *faces*—dey looked like *children*.

Whole gale.

At twilight the wind jumps and buffets. A heavy chop batters the ship, which labors on her moorings. Over the wind men have to shout, and when dark comes, they avoid looking out to sea. Soon they stop talking and lie still in their berths.

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The wind rises through the night to fifty knots or better. Intermittently the sky is clear, and the masts of the rolling vessel carve great circles in the stars. The hull squeaks and bangs with strain. Where the ocean crashes on the reef, wind and waves are lost in the chaotic rush of the dark universe.

Raib prowls the ship most of the night, watching to see if the anchor drags, checking the water in the bilges, taking soundings. Periodically he goes to the port companionway, where his father sits staring straight away into the storm. Then he returns aft and sits against the wheel housing to rest. Sometime after midnight, Byrum comes aft from his own bunk in the engine room. The three sit close by the doorway of the deckhouse, which vents a sad stale smell.

Won't come in out of de wind, den.

No, mon. He won't sleep.

Ain't got time to sleep, no, mon. Not when you dyin.

* * *

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White sails, white clouds, white morning sky.

He's dead, Papa!

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Raib's cuffs hang, and his dry brown feet are scaly in the ocean sun.

He *ain't* dead, Copm Raib. No, mon. I gettin sign!

Wodie!

The old man's head is sunk onto his chest, the white hair blowing. Raib removes the thatch hat and stares at the papery scalp. Slowly he removes his own hat, standing there before his father. Behind him, Buddy removes his cap as the other men come forward.

Pity ye wouldn't eat.

He tries to cross the old man's hands, but they are hooked hard to the conch shell.

Papa? Is he dead?

Boy, death had to come to Copm Andrew more sooner den later, cause he past de age of eighty. He just dried up and blowed away.

Raib turns the white head by the chin; the eyes are clear. Frowning, he pauses, then presses his ear to his father's heart. He leaps backward, wide-mouthed.

Jesus! Why de hell you ain't spoke before!

He never spoke, Papa! I standin right here—

He spoke, I sayin! Right into my ear!

Raib replaces his father's hat, then his own; he shakes his head in wonder, and begins to laugh.

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Not yet! He say it slow like dat—*Not yet!*

The crew watch the Captain's dance of glee—all but Wodie, who climbs to the galley roof and lies down on his back, shielding his eyes.

NOT . . . YET!

* * *

Though he has not eaten, and will not lie down, the old man moves easily with the long roll of the ship, and his liverish hands rest lightly on his conch. His mouth is firm, and his wide eyes are clear. Buddy stands behind the heavy chair, trying to see what the old man perceives.

Grandpapa? D'ye see the land? Cayo Muerto?

The old man is still. On his old thatch hat with its round crown there is a stain where in earlier days he had worn some sort of band, but the collar of his khaki shirt is clean. In the low sun of late afternoon, the silver hair over his ears dissolves in filaments of light against the sparkle of the water, and the ear lobes seem illumined from within, as if his skin had gone transparent.

From the companionway behind comes a faint sweet smell of manure. The green turtles lie belly up, each with a neat turd pile by its tail. One breathes its hollow gasp, and Buddy sinks beside it, on his knees. It lies there mute, unblinking.

You watchin us? Dat what Athens say. He say dat you watchin us die.

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Dark noddies cross the swift colors of the coral bank, toward the cays, which disintegrate in the sun's mist.

* * *

Near twilight, the *Eden* rounds the southwest point of Miskito Cay and comes up into the lee. The island, roughly two miles square, is the largest on the banks, but except for an acre of high ground where water of poor quality may be obtained, it consists mostly of red mangrove. There is no harbor at Miskito Cay, but ships can come in close on the south shore; in hurricane, they are run aground and lashed to the small trees.

There are two vessels in the anchorage. One is the rusty yacht called *Davy Jones*, the other a converted schooner like the *Eden* but much larger; she is trim in appearance, and her dark green paint is new. Turtles are being hoisted into the ship from two catboats that bob along her hull.

Dere she is, mon! De *Alice H. Adams*, Speedy! She takin on her turtle now, gone sail directly to Key West!

* * *

Copm Raib?

Raib lies still, his mouth wide, looking stunned.

Copm Raib? H-ss-t!

Raib opens his eyes and shuts his mouth, as a frown gathers; he gazes at the deckhouse ceiling.

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It Copm Andrew! He gone!

Raib rises slowly in his bunk.

Dass what dey said de last time. You listen to his heart?

No, mon! Never went near him!

How you know, den?

As he speaks, Raib drags his pants on.

I see de fireball! In de hatchway overhead. So I poke my head out, and dat fireball dere by de mast!

Fireball! Never heard about St. Elmo's fire?

Dey ain't no storm, Copm, it full-moon light!

Raib goes out onto the deck.

I tellin you, Wodie, you got dis whole crew thinkin you some kind of Jonah. If I'd have known dat your head was filled with trash. . . .

Raib falls silent. Rounding the forepart of the deckhouse, he pauses by the mast. In the moonlight the bony knees in their worn khaki emerge from the night shadows of the port companionway.

* * *

Ain't got no white suit, but we got his pockets sewed.

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In the yellow light the old man lies, knees up in rigor mortis. While Will presses on the shoulders, Raib tries to straighten out the legs, but every time the legs contract, and the high black shoes lift slowly from the deck.

> See dat? Dey ain't no bendin de old fella, he just as cranky as he ever was—domn! Know what we gone do? Put him back on de throne dere and corry him across de water in dat manner. Eitherwise he be layin in de hole with his knees up in dis woman's way—can't have *dat!* Got to bury him chair and all!

* * *

Daybreak.

Light and sky.

> Amen.

Light scent of sweat and mangrove humus. Mosquito whine. Dried blood on a dark arm.

A cough.

At the sad demeanor of the men, Raib frowns, looks shy, tries not to laugh anew. He sees the catboat off the shore: through the twisting trees, an upright figure watches.

> Desmond! Come ashore, den!

The figure stays the drifting boat by jamming an oar into the bottom on the downwind side. He does not answer.

Raib scrapes earth into the hole and offers the board to

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Vemon.

Dis were de finish of a wind coptin, and a very good sailor mon. Sailed down to dese reefs all de days of his life, and now he died here at Miskita Cay! (*turns to Desmond*) HIS LAST VOYAGE WERE HIS FINISH; DASS WHAT CORRIED HIM! IN HIS OLD AGE HE HAD TOO MUCH AMBITION; HE DIDN'T THINK OF HIS HEALTH, ONLY HIS WILL TO GO, AND DERE WERE DEM STANDIN READY TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF HIS OLD AGE! (*more quietly*) Copm Andrew was a born seaman, one of de best. He one of de best seamen was in de island, and an expert on sailmakin; he could take a vessel and rig her from one end to de next. Knowed everything about it, and he learned me all he knew. Andrew Avers were a very good sailor mon.

A tear appears on Will's dry face.

Oh, yes! A very fine sailor mon!

The catboats from the *Eden* cross the anchorage, and a third boat slides out from the silhouette of the *A.M. Adams*. Lashed across the thwarts of the first boat, the dead man's chair rises and falls against the east horizon. The boats vanish in the shadow of the cay. Men of the *Adams* and the *Eden* stand on either side of a dark pit, dug east and west. Buddy and Will are on their knees, pushing this soil back into the hole with shards of board. Captain Andrew, in his chair, lies turned over backward in the hole, his hat haloed around his head, hands still folded in his lap. He is faced eastward. His eyes, half open, are fixed upon branches overhead that flail at the gray sky.

An ant crosses his cheek.

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Where's dat old conch shell dat he cherished? Did ye leave it aboard de vessel?

Holding his hat against his chest, Raib coughs to repress a smile.

Not . . . yet! he say. Dem were de last words of *dis* old fella!

The branches creak.

Copm Andrew Avers! (*pause*) Well, Copm Andrew went and he went and he went, and would not help hisself—wouldn't hardly raise one hand. But in de end he went away very well. He were not able to give testimony, but he went in peace, and we very hopeful for his soul.

Raib looks from one face to the other.

Amen.

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Will takes the tiller ~~of his boat;~~ Byrum ~~[anxious to get there,~~ is at the bow oars. [Raib jumping down, grabs the tiller from Will, who moves amidships.

[Lookit de mate dere! Let's see can he row!

[Row, mon? Will de island's best.

The catboat moves across the swells toward the pier, ~~she~~ lifting and settling in the troughs as the seas pass.

At the seaward end, the pier is high and gaunt, dripping with brine as the wave passes. ~~Then the~~ Each wave raises the ~~black cavern underneath~~ mast ~~with wash and rumbling, raising the~~ three ships ~~[illegible]~~ heaving them back; the old soft hawsers creak. All the ships are headed seaward, so that their bows may part the heavy waves. ~~[Will ties up under the stern of a German freighter that is loading [illegible] long leaf pine.~~ The catboat is tied to the stern of a freighter that is taking on fruit and timber.

Byrum follows Raib to the dockmaster's shack, halfway down the pier, ~~where he whistles at~~ There whores ~~[illegible]~~ badger ~~[illegible]~~ idle men who are clustered around a radio: the thin whistle and static of the radio nags at the rush of wind and sea. Byrum calls ~~back down to~~ for Will to come

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The Craft of Fiction in *Far Tortuga*

Peter Matthiessen

Q: James Dickey feels that *Far Tortuga* is a turning point in the evolution of the novel, that you are "creating our new vision." Would you say something about this book's development?

A: *Far Tortuga* is based on a sea turtle fishing voyage off Nicaragua: *tortuga* is the Spanish word for sea turtle, and sometimes refers to a cay where green turtles are found. I started work on the book in 1966, and since then, it's been put aside many times, but I never tired of it. I was moved by the stark quality of that voyage, everything worn bare by wind and sea—the reefs, the faded schooner, the turtle men themselves—everything so pared down and so simple that metaphors, stream-of-consciousness, even such ordinary conventions of the novel as "he said" or "he thought," seemed intrusive, even offensive, and a great impediment, besides. So from the start I was feeling my way toward a spare form, with more air around the words, more space: I wanted the descriptions to be very clear and flat, to find such poetry as they might

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attain in their very directness and simplicity. In fact, I can only recall one simile in the whole book. And eventually, I attempted using white space to achieve resonance, to make the reader receive things intuitively, hear the silence in the wind, for instance, that is a constant presence in the book.

In Japanese *sumi* painting, in a drawing of a bamboo stalk, the brush moves upward, leaving a white space between strokes to suggest the nodes of the bamboo that separate sections of the stem; it's the emptiness that brings the rest to life. Similarly, the emptiness and silence represented by white spaces set up reverberations in what is written. But I neglected to anticipate the mechanical problems of these spaces in terms of the printed page, and in the end I had to compromise on the white-space idea. Next time I'll draw the whole novel onto the blank pages of an artist's sketch book so that white spaces and juxtapositions will be just the way I want.

Q: Has your study of Zen affected this book?

A: Perhaps it has contributed to a need for spareness, the presentation of a coffee cup, a cockroach, with a minimum of literary adornment. Zen training helps one to see in a fresh way, to dissolve the screens that build up from early childhood and obscure one's perceptions, and I suppose I am trying to present things directly, let objects and actions speak for themselves, so that the reader will not have to perceive things through the screens in the minds of the characters.

Q: How does your editor feel about this experimental novel?

A: Well, I guess he was pretty suspicious at first, assured me it wouldn't sell, of course, but after he'd spent some time with it, it began to get to him. Some readers may be wary—certain critics, too—of the strange type set-up on the page: they'll say, "Oh-oh! An *experiment*!" But actually, the experiment, if that is what it is, is very simple, no tricks or word games at all, and once the reader gets the feel of the new form, the book is

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quite straightforward. In the beginning, since you don't know the crew, it doesn't really matter much that you're not always sure which man is speaking: by the time you do care, you will recognize each man, not only by the idiosyncrasies of speech but by his small obsessions. There's a ship's manifest with each crewman's name, kin, and particulars, and a deck plan of the vessel which serves as a sort of stage set, and an endpaper map for following her course off Nicaragua—all these help.

Q: Do you recognize other influences?

A: I mentioned *sumi* painting, and an admiration of *haiku* poetry may well have influenced the brief descriptive passages. But leaving space experiments aside, the basic physical format derives from the screenplay, even though the person speaking is not identified directly, and the camera directions are replaced by descriptive writing. The dialogue is realistic, but toward the end, I recognized that I had put an element of folksong in it, naturally enhanced by the power and simple beauty of the turtle men's speech. And of course a turtle boat is a good situation for the sort of experiment I was trying—a small isolated world, a confined stage which nobody could leave, and men who sing the refrains of their bewilderment over and over.

Q: Could the form you have developed be adapted to other types of novels?

A: I hope so, since I'd like to try again; next time, I'll carry it further, perhaps, if I can do so without loss of clarity and feeling.

Q: What was that one simile, and why did you leave it in the book?

A: I guess I didn't want to take it out. It comes when the *Eden*'s men first see Far Tortuga on the horizon, and refers to

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an island, "like a memory in the ocean emptiness." The image seemed to me mysterious, nostalgic, suggesting that the turtlers were returning to a mythical childhood place, perhaps even that, unknown to themselves, they were already dead and had entered another world. In any case, the image occurred naturally, and I didn't want to take it out just to be consistent.

—G.A.P.

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A Portfolio of Poems by Charles Simic

ELEGY

No one has seen me today
as I too have seen
no one
not even myself

here
bent as I was
intently
over the particular.

MYTHOLOGY

A place known
as the grocery
toward which a child advances
on an errand

the fundamental equation
of an empty street
in a rundown neighborhood

along which a child advances
the poor son of poor parents
who aspire to please
at such an early hour

the magical coins
in his pocket
occupying all his thoughts

a place known
as the grocery
its screendoor screeching
endlessly screeching

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TIME OCCUPIED BY A WINK

in which a faucet drips
somewhere in this large
and quiet house

the grave deliberations
which precede
the release of each drop

time enough to feel
its just weight
to imagine its blinding clarity

as it plunges down
toward the opaque.

THE SYSTEM

A dark thought
guards us
from burglars

on the watch-chain
of our insomnia
it sits howling
at its own constellation in the sky

we feed it only
the finely-sanded
small giddy bones
of the inner ear

we make it drink
at the salt-lick
of our faces in the dark
the glistening beads of our tossing and turning

they say
that we are fooling ourselves
that the master burglars
have already come and gone

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THE LESSON

It occurs to me now
that all these years
I have been
the idiot pupil
of a practical joker.
Diligently
and with foolish reverence
I wrote down
what I took to be
his wise pronouncements
concerning
my life on earth.
Like a parrot
I rattled off the dates
of wars and revolutions.
I rejoiced
at the death of my tormentors.
I even became convinced
that their number
was diminishing.

It seemed to me
that gradually
my teacher was revealing to me
a pattern,
that what I was being told
was an intricate plot
of a picaresque novel
in installments,
the last pages of which
will be given over
entirely
to lyrical evocations
of nature.

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Unfortunately,
with time,
I began to detect in myself
an inability
to forget even
the most trivial detail.
I lingered, more and more,
over the beginnings:
the haircut of a soldier
who was urinating against our fence;
an apple tree in bloom
the day
my mother and I
had nothing to eat.
In short,
I couldn't get past
that prison train
that kept waking me up
each night.
I couldn't get that whistle
that rumble
out of my head. . . .

In this classroom
modestly furnished
by my insomnia.
At this desk consisting
of my two bony knees,
for the first time
in almost a lifetime
I burst out laughing.
Forgive me, Lord.
At the memory of my uncle
charging a barricade
with a homemade bomb,
I burst out laughing.

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THE CIRCLE

Vicious circle,
Full of spite.

Circle of unrelived nastiness,
Torture.

Circle of suffering,
Of madness.

Interminable,
Sinister figure.

Heinous spindle,
Hackneyed, demonic wheel.

Are you getting
More and more frenzied,

Or have you reached
The final spin
Of your malice?

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POEM

As when someone
you haven't noticed before
gets up in an empty theatre
and projects his shadow
among the fabulous horsemen
on the screen

and you shudder
as you realize it's only you
on your way
to the blinding sunlight
of the street.

BETWEEN PARENTHESES

In her widow's purse
my mother carries
a thought heavier
than her heart

when no one's looking
she takes it out
and examines it
with her face averted

when no one's looking
she sews a blanket
from the thread of that thought
to tuck us all in

only its familiar weight
could make us fall asleep

only its maternal dark
could make us luminous.

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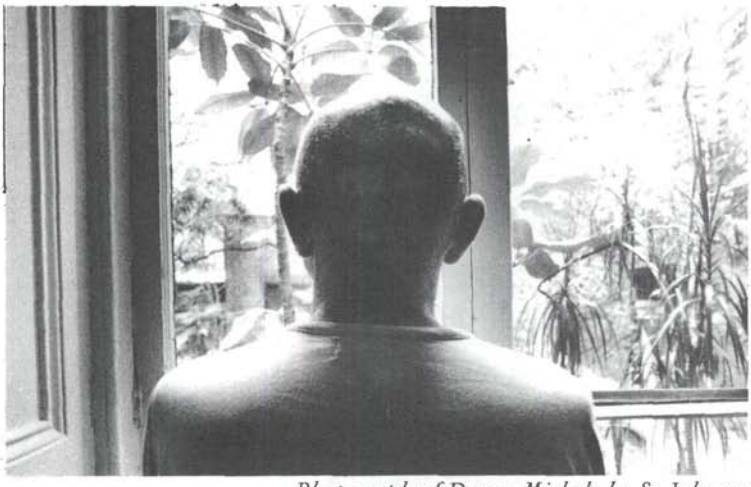
Duane Michals

A Portfolio



Photograph of Duane Michals by Sy Johnson

In his photographic sequences, Duane Michals has expanded the possibilities of his medium. While most photographs deal with static appearances, Michals' depend on transformations and disappearances. His concerns involve more the oneiric and personal than objective renderings of a "reality." For his influences we do best to look at Magritte and de Chirico than Edward Weston or Ansel Adams.

That is not to say he has abandoned the sophisticated mechanics of his field but that he has relegated them to a secondary, vehicular role. "I hate the perfectness of photography," Michals asserts, and laments those "photographers who go out looking for subjects to photograph and become so dazzled with technique that their results demonstrate little else."

Realities commence for Michals in his own shaven head. "I prefer photographs that would have no existence without my imagination," and Michals' photographs reflect the mutability, the flux, the bizarre and tasteful elements that comprise a radiant and active imagination.

—F.H.

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Margaret Finds a Box

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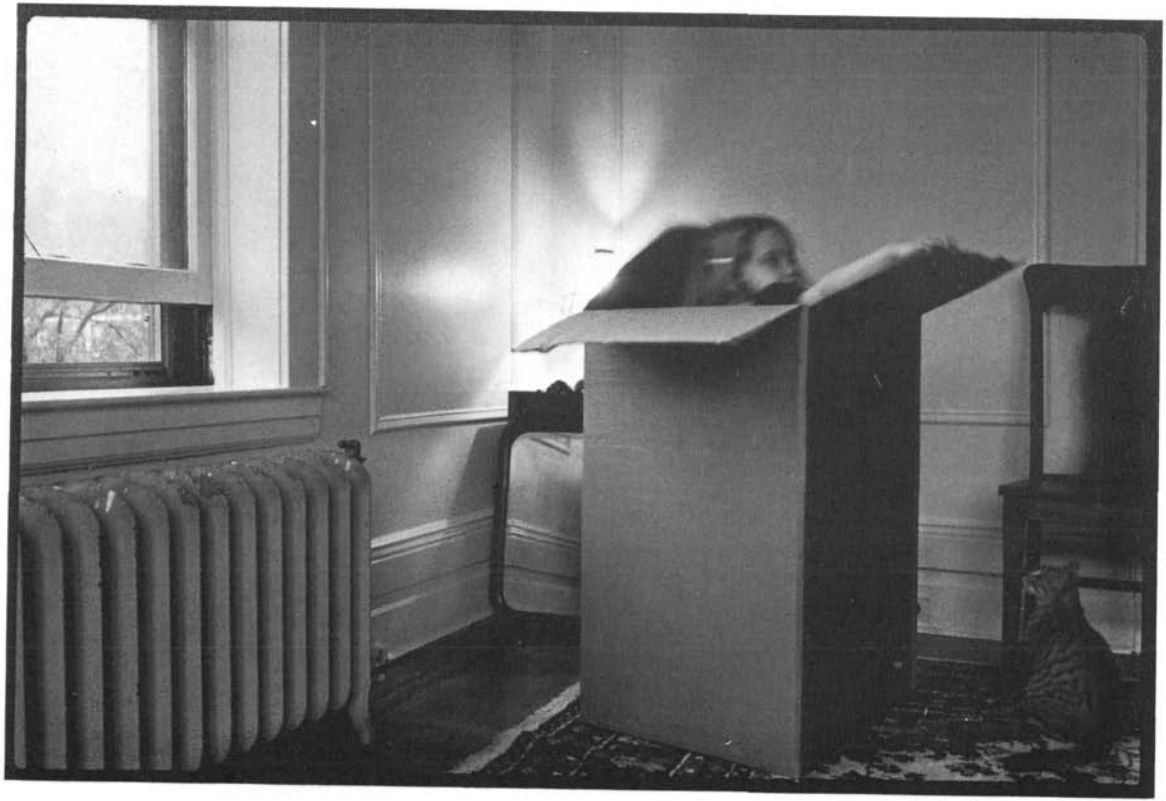

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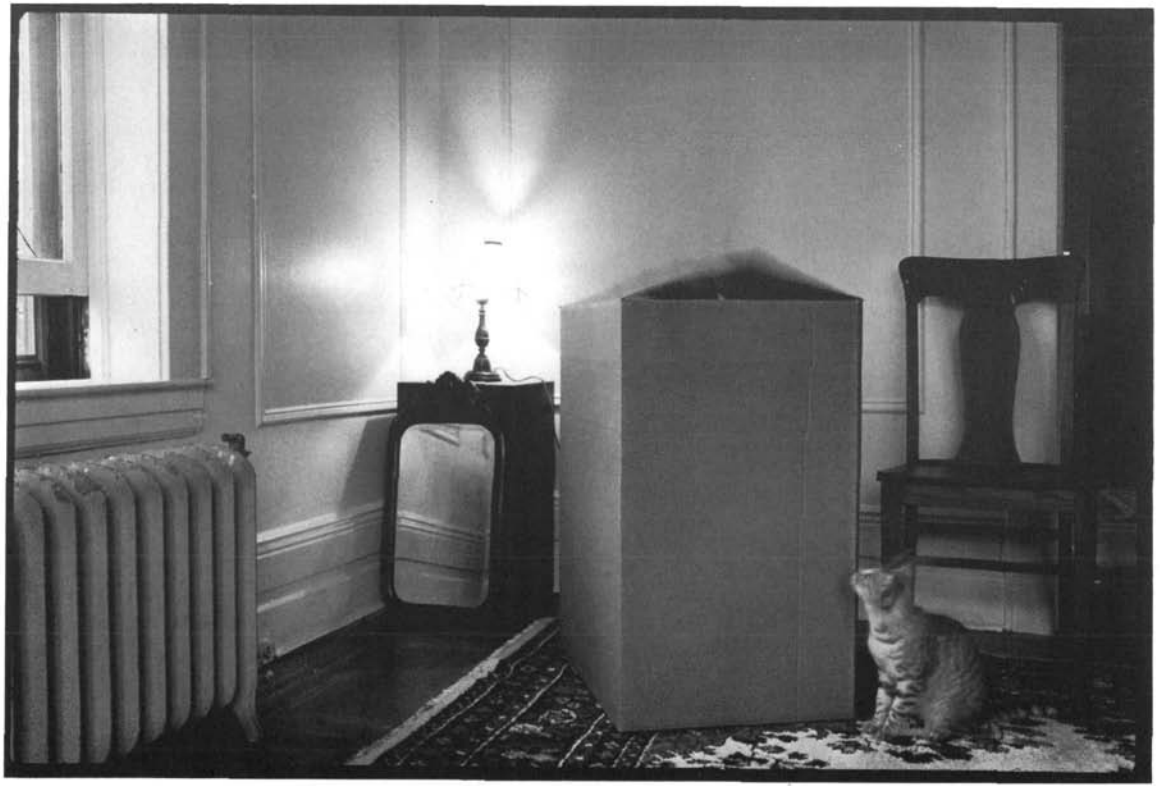

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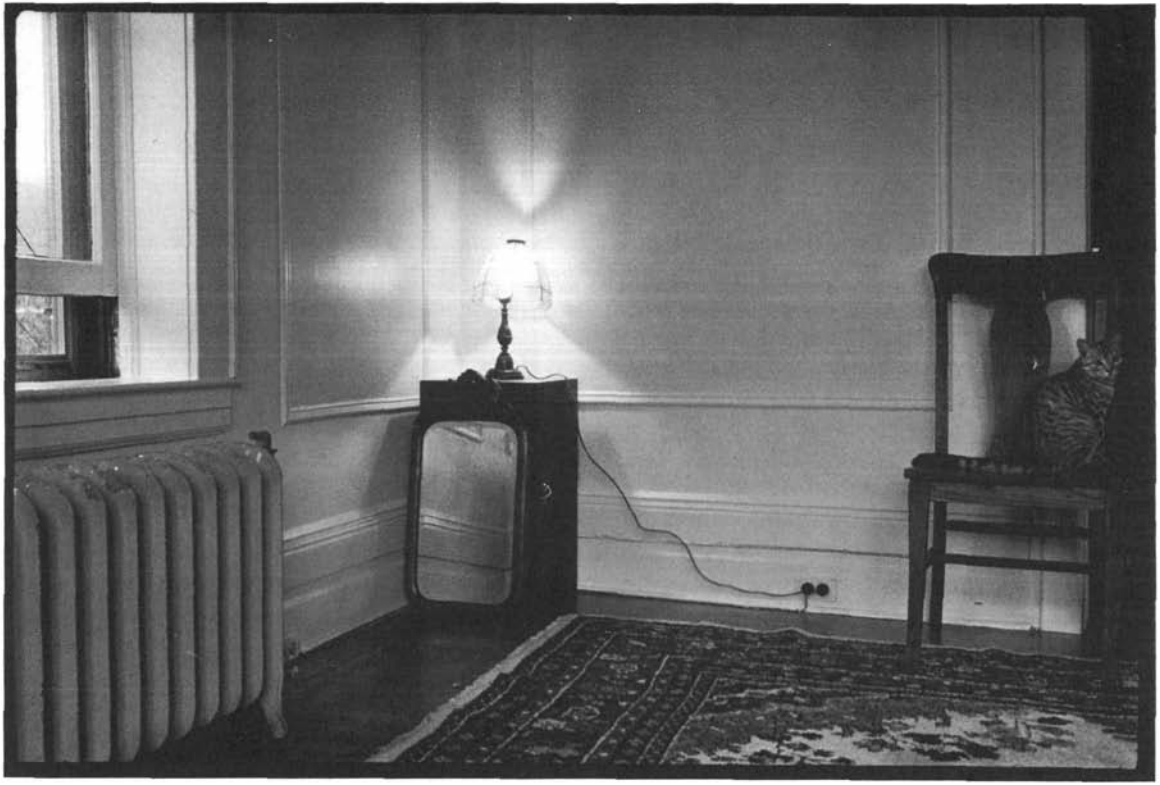

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Dannye Romine

IN THE PERIODICAL ROOM

At the next table
a woman in patent shoes,
blue summer shift
flips through *House Beautiful*.
On her arm the flat oval
of a small pox vaccination
gleams like egg yolk.
I feel it is my duty
to reduce her age.
First I tuck her several chins
into her neck,
smooth the fan of wrinkles
from her cheek,
prune all flesh
so bones protrude.
At last she is thirteen,
wears middy blouse
and pleated navy skirt.
Later she will play croquet
on her grandfather's lawn.
A balding man in nylon socks,
khaki shorts
approaches her table.
He smoothes the space
between the tufts of gray,
checks his watch.
He told his wife
to meet him here
at exactly half past three.
Now all he can find
is this ridiculous girl
swinging her legs
and licking a peppermint stick.

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Three Poems by L.L. Zeiger

MISCONCEPTIONS

For so many years, Clive Barnes,
I thought your name was Olive.
All the things I was reading in books
and did not say to anyone
and could not say to anyone—
How I blushed with shame
when caught in my misconceptions,
like being seen masturbating.

Now that I am wiser
I find everything confusing
even when I pronounce it perfectly.
A simple statement like "Void where prohibited"—
How shall I read it?
How shall I think it?
I want to take it as an imperative
and pee on the floor of the public library.

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LEO

Leo why did I love you?
Better still, why did you love me?
They called you the lion but
you were only four feet tall
and when you sat down at the piano
two of them barely reached the pedals.
And in your huge head
ferret eyes hid behind thick glasses,
and a voice squeaked so helplessly
through your adenoids.

But nobody ever laughed
when you sat down at the piano—
and that was when I loved you best,
when I watched in the wings at sixteen,
making believe I was June Allyson
waiting in my big white collar
for you to finish with the crowd
to the strains of Night and Day
and come back to me me me.

And those wonderful places
where everyone knew you
and it took me a while to realize
that the waiters were dykes
and the chorus girls queens—
and yet they didn't seem to mind
my graduation dress and ankle straps.

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Leo remember how you bought me whore's underwear
but never went below the belt.
You stood on tiptoe in your elevated shoes
and worshipped me with kisses
in that stairwell on East Fifth Street
where behind the door
my mother and the roaches
lay in waiting.

Leo where are you now?
Playing at some two-bit carnival in Altoona?
Married to your fat pink lady from the Bowery?
Buried somewhere in a tiny coffin?

Leo Leo come back I need you—
I've got a couple of kids now
and a couple of chins
and a house in the suburbs—
and nothing surprises me anymore.

Let's go to Club 82 again
and I'll be in drag as a young girl
with tight little breasts
pushing out my red sweater.

Let's find the Garden Bar somewhere off Irving Place
and dance close in the back room with the lights out
and your wispy hair will barely brush against my lips.
You'll be my ugly beautiful jester
my faithful dwarf—
and I'll still be wondering if your prick is small too.

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ENVOI

Ah, my poems, here you are—
you've come home again!
Here is that white envelope I folded,
hopeful as a spinster's linens,
the friendly black pica of my very own name typed by me,
my eager spittle under the sober head of each stamp.
My poems, who are so shame-faced as you greet me,
believe me I understand how you feel.
You've gone far and wide
from Chelsea, New York to Crete, Nebraska—
you have done your best
and nobody wanted you.

It's always the same:
the perfect vellum messages of sympathy from The Best
Magazines,
the snippets of bright paper scrawled "Sorry"—
the teasers which start out "April 14 (I think!)"
Nobody wants you.
I can picture the scornful glances they gave you,
the heartless way they dismissed you (summarily, I'm sure),
the clips, spindles, staples with which they mauled you—
(Who do they think they are sticking pins in my images?)

What is this viscous smudge in the corner of a love poem—
a thumb print, Kraft mayonnaise, editor's ejaculant?
The odd little crease almost in the center of this ode—
Did some midget muezzin who is also a
graduate assistant in English at Morocco State
genuflect here, his hairpiece toward Mecca?
(Surely it is not fair to make fun of Moslems alone in this poem.

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I will have to remember to include a Sister of Charity and
a Lubavitcher somehow later on.)

My poems, how I love you!
Do not feel rejected.
You must leave me again, but not for more than
6-8 weeks at most (slightly longer for *Partisan Review* or
recently defunct publications).
Let us sit awhile and have a few last drinks before you go.
I can't guarantee that I'll face another separation calmly,
though.
I may follow you on my hard-working knees like the
indomitable
Mothers of Russia, clinging to you with powerful biceps, my
babushka in glorious disarray, my peasant face buried in your
collective fly. (How come I always think of you as *men* by the
way?)
My little spike heels will sink repeatedly into the desert sands
as I run after you in your trim Foreign Legion visors—
(How obliquely I am echoing an earlier reference here!)
Or perhaps I will turn, my clenched fists breaking through the
sleazy pocket linings of my old trench coat, my collar turned up
so that it keeps getting in the way of my Mexican earrings—
and simply walk away into the night.

My poems, my darlings,
I kiss you, I bless you, I pray that God (at least)
may keep you!

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Randy Blasing

SOME LEGS

A toe dances under my nose My eye
Takes it from there, moving on up peekaboo style
Over ankles and calves past kneecaps to thighs—
Thighs with their underthings!—and stops
There at the height
Of the experience, as if the dirty
Old eye were on its last legs and had nowhere
Else to roam, having taken in
All of the leg and counting itself lucky
To have been an eye Oh! Fat legs, skinny legs,
Hollow legs, bowlegs, piano legs, leggy legs, ah
Legs of all sizes, shapes, and colors!
Great-ankled American schoolgirl legs,
Hefty German legs, long-stemmed Scandinavian legs, famous
English legs, French legs, Italian legs, Spanish legs
Sneaking out on their duenna, Mediterranean legs
In general and Turkish legs in particular,
Raw-boned Russian legs, Chinese marching legs,
Retiring Indian legs undulating under saris,
Legs chafed by traditional shynesses,
Game legs, underfed legs, emerging nations' legs,
Legs getting in and out of cars, legs not quite long enough
To reach the accelerator, long legs
Climbing stairs, legs up in the air
After a long day on their feet,
Legs standing on their own two feet,
Legs without a leg to stand on,
Mothers' legs passed on for better or worse,
Visions, dreams, and thoughts of legs, plus the big
Idea of legs walking out on these lines!

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Adam LeFevre

PLANNING AHEAD

I have always considered it bad policy to land on my head. I try my best to avoid doing so. The head is just not structured to bear the weight of the body, or to withstand more than an occasional semi-violent thump. The soles of the feet, on the other hand, manage this quite well. I have jumped from a few moving vehicles in my day, and let me tell you, the head is just a frightened onlooker in such instances.

Yet who sings of feet? Even Shakespeare, perhaps the greatest writer who ever lived, ignored them, so lost was he in the dizzying music of the head. The other morning, oh I guess it was about three, I woke up with a shout. I was sweating and I felt very uncomfortable. Yes. I was having a nightmare. In this nightmare I was being pursued by human skeletons on motorcycles. I was trying to run, but they were getting closer and closer. I could see their fixed bloody grins, and their empty sockets stared lecherously at the flesh of my face. A thoroughly unpleasant dream. One I have quite often. I switched on the light, and went to get a glass of water. My rate of respiration was abnormally high, as if I had been engaging in violent exercise. In reality, of course, I had been sleeping. But it is a proven fact that psychic excitation often stimulates correlated physiological responses. As I was drinking, I had a thought which caused my heart to jump. I sat down immediately and began to write a letter to my darling, the most sweetest and ethereal woman in the world, so far as I'm concerned. She was so far away she might as well have been in some foreign country. O my heart ached for her as I wrote! I inquired about her health, the weather, etc., merely as a way of dispelling my own fear. I told her all the news from home, the things I was writing, the plays I had seen, but I could not for long content myself with such

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trivial amenities. My pen began to pour forth the inevitable truth, the love I felt for her. "You are my only desire," I wrote, "I love you more than life/I am like a man dead until I am/holding your sweet face and touched/by the divinity of your breath." I sighed over the letter for an hour, finally sealing it in a white envelope to be mailed at daybreak. I climbed back in bed, but there was no sleep for me. I lay there thinking about my sweetheart, recalling each tender caress we had shared.

The soul enters or leaves the body by one of two avenues: the nostrils and mouth (I consider these one), and the feet. Perhaps you didn't know it, but the feet are very erotic fellows. It is a medical fact that at the moment of sexual climax, the feet arch involuntarily and the toes curl. If you were to say this is the soul bowing to love, I would say, "Yes! O yes! That is possible!"

It is so easy to joke about feet. How is it that we who are so poker-faced about our heads can be so openly derisive about our feet? O yes, feet are often laughable, the way they look like prehistoric fish or crazy dragsters, and I enjoy a good laugh as much as the next guy, but I am angered by this constant belittling of feet. It has got to stop! I will continue to praise all feet. The feet of my love. The feet of our President. Your feet and mine.

Is it wrong to be sentimental about feet? I saw a footless man who cried all day because he missed his feet. I can certainly understand that.

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Jack Cope

Drinker of the Bitter Water

The lion turned to glare back over its shoulder. At the same time there came the Slam! Slam! of guns and up ahead in the burning red sand-dune spurts of dust like sudden tufts of dead grass where the bullets hit. At the lion's side the wounded lioness dragged herself. Her jaw was open and blood on the teeth and tongue, blood in a streak down her side below the shoulder-blade. There was a blue-grey thing, a truck. They were firing from the truck, afraid to dismount. The lion was afraid too but also angry.

They had killed one lioness and two half-grown cubs and wounded the second lioness. Now they were after it and after the lion especially; they fired from the moving truck which was cruising across the flat and the aim was not sure.

The wounded lioness and the male at her side got over the knife-rim of the dune and started to go down the heavy hot sand that stood their weight a moment as if congealed and then suddenly flowed under their pads, a thick shining red liquid. The truck was now out of sight and making a whining

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noise trying to rush the wind-slope of the dune. In front of the lions was the wide ash-grey floor and beyond it another great hump of a red dune running out of sight both ways to the dancing shimmer of the horizon, dune behind endless sand-dune to the furthermost edge of the desert. No trees—the stunted hummocks of dwarf camelthorn and bluebush and sparse shining-hair grass—ash and silver and blue under the lowering sun. And in the middle of that flat pale floor a single great blotch of fierce deceptive green—a trassies-bush, dense, defensively low, almost impossible to penetrate.

The lions made for the bush, the one patch of cover visible anywhere but for the shapes that rose like shade-trees in the mirage. The female dragged her weight without feeling into the clawing tangle of the trassies-bush. Hooked thorns ripped at her hide, tore out tufts of hair. Behind her the male pushed heavily, put his face down and let the thorns comb and crackle through his heavy mane. Deep in the tangle the lioness burst into a dry hole of ant-eaten branches and fell on her side. The lion lay near and began to lick at her wound.

The truck came down over the dune and the men saw their quarry had found the only shelter for miles. It was too dangerous to try flushing a wounded lion out of a trassies-bush. They were afraid to get down and uneasy about the patrols and the daylight running out. They cruised round the clump of fierce green bush. One man stood up on the roof of the cab and tried to peer into the thicket, but he could see nothing. Each time the truck stopped moving he lifted the Winchester repeating rifle to his shoulder and slapped bullets at quick fire into the bush. There was no movement and no sound from inside. The lion went on licking its mate, which was now dead.

The men in the truck could afford no more time. The sun was far over westwards. They left off trying to get at the two animals, turned the vehicle and sped away south at first along the floor between the dunes. Then they swung left and began to switchback over the red ribs of the desert to get out eastwards and across the border, rushing at the firm lower slopes with the four-wheel-drive, a sick lurch at the top and a glide

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down the far side. They had the bodies of the one lioness and two half-grown cubs in the back of the truck. There was no time to stop and skin them; that could be done in the night or early morning and the carcasses thrown to the hyenas or buried in a sandpit. The lioness's skin was worth R55 for sale to tourists and the smaller ones, say, R30 each. The big male would have made a lot more. It was a very large animal, a prize, larger than they had ever seen, and the Kalahari lions were the greatest in Africa.

The lion licked his mate during the night and nudged her soft flank with his nose, waiting for her to awaken. They prowled mostly by night and he would not go without her. They were on the move. What made the droves of springbok at one moment lower their heads and begin like a slow swell of the blood to trek out? The lesser and the greater antelopes, the ostriches and the winged birds, blue wildebeest and giraffe all knew when the time came to start a trail, and its only destination was life—life against the desert. The lions also knew. The big lion, its two mates and growing young had been trekking a long time, out of the wilderness, over parched sand, through scrub and across the dunes. There had been more of them at first, but the others had fallen to guns along the trail until now only the male was left.

The lioness had become stiff and already the small rustling things were gathering towards the body; the flies smelt death in the night and were drifting like sparks in the moonlight and settling around the black hump of the trassies-bush. The lion got up and with head lowered it made the dark coughing sounds that were the voice of grief. It pushed out through the thorns and from the edge of the bush it looked about. A greybuck flew like a small arrow into the night leaving a trail of smoky dust in the moonlight. Clouds like the side of a fish were catching the first glimmer of dawn and the Morning Star floated large and near in the calm sky. The lion turned its back to the east and continued its trail alone.

At sunrise a green patrol truck came up between two red dunes and then crossed over into the next floor. A Bushman

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leaning over the side slammed his hand on the steel panel and the truck stopped. He jumped down and the others followed him, two whitemen in khaki and soft felt hats with a green badge. They looked at the trail and the Bushman traced it some way and came back.

"How old are the marks, Henrik?" the older man asked.

"Yesterday—" he pointed west to the sun's position then.

They followed the trail for half an hour and found where the truck had turned to make for the open border. It had too long a start and so they doubled back to see what had brought it. Henrik found the track of the wheels around the bush, and then he picked up the lion's fresh spoor.

"Kgam'ma!" he shouted—Lion!

They came and looked in silence.

"This is the lord of all the lions," Henrik said at last.

"Do you know him?"

He shook his head and laughing he spanned his small hand over the great footprint. "Kgam'ma, oubaas van die leeus!" he repeated—Lord of the lions.

They found the smaller spoor of the lioness and the gouts of her blood, and Henrik smelt her dead body in the trassies-bush. He wormed his way into the thicket with a towing rope and they hauled out the dead body. The bullet had gone through the lung and upper thorax and they found it under the skin of the right shoulder. Barnabas, the younger of the rangers, cut it out with his knife and it was only slightly flattened.

"Pa, it's a Winchester 309," he said to Simeon, his father, giving him the bullet. "I guess I know who did this."

Henrik picked up the spoor of Kgam'ma and tracked it. He had stripped himself of his tunic and boots and loped along at a quick swaying trot. The truck came behind, whining and slithering up the steep windslopes and over the red dunes. Mile after mile the Bushman ran on without a pause. The sun struck on his copper-gold skin and on the sparse ridges of his hair. They came into a dry river bed, shallow, filled with centuries of wind-drift and marked by a few silvery thorn trees and

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raisin bushes and the blue-bush growing perceptibly higher. Henrik stopped and climbed in the truck. "He is near," he said.

"Well, we can leave him," Simeon said. "He's come in from the Botswana side and looks to me he's heading for the Nossob waterholes."

"I'd like to see him," his son said.

"We'll see him in time, I don't doubt."

They cruised about for a while but did not see Kgam'ma that day. No one saw him. The desert was wide and he had merged back into its trackless distances hidden from the sun and living alone under the white fire of the nights, the dust and electric storms. A black man from Ramahoela who had lost his way in an insane attempt to cross the desert on foot slept one night with his head on the roots of a camelthorn and woke to see a lion under the same tree. He thought he was delirious or already a spirit and closed his eyes to shut out the sight. The Bushmen found him there and convinced him that what he had seen was true. The lion had killed and eaten part of an oryx and the remains of the big buck lay fifty yards away. The animal had gone but, by its spoor, Henrik declared "it was most likely Kgam'ma himself."

Three weeks later Simeon took Henrik with him alone on a routine patrol. They had worked together a long time—since the Nossob river had last flowed which was nearly thirty years ago. Simeon had two enemies, the thieves and slaughterers from outside, and the drought. He ruled his territory, which was a corner of the desert no larger than a small country like Ireland, with the hand of equality. All things had the value of life, the great antelopes, oryx and eland, the little greybuck, the martial eagle and the colony weaver, tortoise and whip-snake and lizard, hyenas or lion. To the wild, man was the destroyer. The animals looked with large strange eyes at the shapes of truck and car, but when man stepped out in his own separateness, clothed with his own smell of death, they recognized him.

As the two men left the patrol car the oryx flung back the

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long sabres of their horns and with full black tails flowing like banners on the hot wind they burnt white trails across the flats. The ostriches leaned in giant strides over stilt legs and vultures waiting like filthy beggars for their last turn at the waterhole stumbled into the air. Simeon walked to the outlet pipe and tasted the water being heaved up by the creaking windmill. It was brack and bitter, almost undrinkable for man, but life-giving to the wild. The tank was well filled.

Then the two men set out in different directions to read things for themselves. Simeon had left his rifle in the car, as he always did, and the Bushman also went unarmed. Above the river bed was a ridge of limestone deeply hollowed where the wild bees made nests, hyenas slept through the day and leopards had their lairs. The two men climbed the ridge at different places and commanded a long view over the grey-blue scrub and the ripple of sand-dunes going away like the wave-crests of a red shoreless ocean. They walked on, noting things: the state of the grazing and the tracks in the sand. Tufts of wiry grass nibbled, prickly bitter cucumbers, the tough three-thorn scrub, almost leafless but nutritious. The presence of birds, spiders, beetles under the furnace of the sun.

Henrik made a sudden small call and the ranger stopped. He was being signalled back. Without turning he began to shift away and towards Henrik. Then he saw the cause . . . carefully hidden by bluebush and a spreading camelthorn were the lions. They were more than two hundred yards away; lions were inert in the heat of the day, but Henrik was backing out as fast as he could. Now the men kept low, moving cautiously until the animals were out of sight. Then they ran in the hollow and worked back over the stony ridge at a different point.

"What's the matter?" Simeon said.

"Kgam'ma . . ." the way Henrik said it left no doubt which lion he meant. Even though they caught only a glimpse through the bush, they had seen the great lion himself. Simeon fetched binoculars from the patrol car and climbed again for a careful reconnoitre from the ridge. Where they had

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first seen the animals there were two lionesses but the male had moved forward and was crouching among dwarf bush. It was watching them.

"He's stalking us," Simeon said.

"Hai!"

"He could reach here in seconds—let's go." He raised his hat in his hand and saw the lion duck its head. Then they pulled down below the ridge and ran for the car. The Bushman said nothing on the way back; they had both seen enough to understand the danger in Kgam'ma. He had found himself two new mates and he meant to protect them. He seemed to have come to stay.

A small flock of Persian sheep kept to supply meat to the camp and to the Bushman families was taken to graze in a defined area of the desert across the dry river. Every two days they were brought back to water by the shepherd. On the nights he spent in the desert he found a camelthorn tree, made his fire under it to scare off wild animals and watched his flock. In the heat of the day he slept while the sheep stood with heads under each others' bellies. A week after Kgam'ma had been seen the shepherd fell asleep long enough at night to let his fire die. A lion came among the sheep and scattered them. The shepherd made a calculated leap into the tree and from there he heard the fearful roaring and the crunch of bones and the pattering of hooves away into the distance. In the morning he ran back for help.

Simeon went out with trackers. The flock had been harassed over a distance of eight miles and seventy-three sheep, nearly a third of their number, killed; only one was eaten. Henrik tracked beyond the last dead sheep and then came back to Simeon in the truck.

"Well?"

He shook his head. "It was a big lion."

"The same one?"

"It could be, oubaas, but this one was lame in one foot."

Simeon did not know what to do. Such a slaughter of domestic stock he had never heard of before. He had his feeling

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about Kgam'ma but could not be sure that he was the killer, and he discussed it with his son, Barnabas.

"Are you thinking of shooting the lion, Pa?" Barnabas asked.

"No, I'm not thinking of that; I haven't shot one in thirty years. Only this animal is different—be careful. I mean, if it's the same one."

"I'd like to see him, Pa."

The older man only screwed up his sharp blue eyes against the light and took out his pipe and lit it. "You'll see him."

The lion bit and licked and gnawed at the thorn in the central pad of his forepaw. The long white thorn had gone in deep and broken off and he could not get at it with his teeth. Already the paw was swollen with the poison and he could not put it down. When he walked it was at a heavy limp on three legs. He had driven away other males for the two new mates and now he was at a disadvantage should it come to a fight—he was old too and the poisoned paw made him sick. Each day the lionesses killed, a blue wildebeest or a big heavy oryx, and he ate, but not to his fill. On a night when the pain grew and strung at his whole leg he began to move again. He left the bitter waterhole and drove the two lionesses with him, limping and snarling ferociously, and they went along at his side. They snarled back but were too subdued to do anything. They were his mates so long as he could hold them. The three travelled away from the dry river and towards the dawn, towards life. It was night and the moon shining and no wind; a wind would smother their spoor.

They slept the day and then went on. The lionesses looked for prey, but they were far out across the red sand and there were no big antelope. They killed a springbok and drank its blood, but there was not much blood for Kgam'ma and he was thirsty. The third night there was no kill, and the fourth. The three animals lay together in the sparse burning shade of a blue-grey thorntree and kept their heads down and their ears back, waiting. The wind had risen one night, blowing a great

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red dust-storm over the desert that rolled with a terrible reverberation against the thunderclouds. Then for two nights the lions had left a crisp trail across the dunes and hollows, Kgam'ma limping heavily and losing his strength. Always he drove them on towards the sunrise and the three big animals lay now in the heat in a great extremity.

Kgam'ma raised his head and the females were alert too. They heard a faint long sound and their six yellow slitted eyes turned in the direction it came from. Over the red dune in the searing light they saw the little upright figure appear, stop and suddenly run back. Kgam'ma lowered his head and crouched his hind-legs under him. The lionesses got up and began to trot away. As the noise grew a big shape came over the crest of the dune where the man had been and the patrol truck drove straight towards them. They turned for a moment to stare; the lionesses were the first to break into a run, and suddenly Kgam'ma ran too. Weakened and lame on one leg, his power had not left him and he bounded through the three-thorn scrub and over the first dune. From the top he looked for cover and there was none. Above him in the sky a chanting goshawk rained down its trumpet cry—a thing of air, silver breast and silver and black wings, it was free above the world; it rolled and dived in the water of the sky.

The two lionesses were loping fast through the next hollow and Kgam'ma trailed behind. The truck came after them. It was screaming and jolting up the windslopes and through the ashen floors, gaining on the lions every minute. Kgam'ma turned away from the line of flight and the truck followed him. Twist and double, it clung to the chase, wearing him down.

Simeon drove the truck and Barnabas stood back of the cab with the Bushmen trackers. With one hand he clung to the rail and in the other he held the cross-bow wound up and loaded with the short sharp bolt. The truck overtook the lion, running to one side, sixty, forty, thirty yards range—then slowed and gave Barnabas his chance. He raised the cross-bow for a flash aim and pressed the trigger. The bolt with its anaesthetic

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charge hit the lion high on the shoulder and stuck there.

Then Simeon swung hard off the line of the chase and raced the engine at full speed. Kgam'ma had turned on his pursuers for a final charge. His speed closed the distance and he roared for the kill. In his path the trackers threw down sacks of grass. He fell on one and ripped it apart, growling and rolling in the dust. Just twelve seconds after the strike the great lion-body slackened and the hot brain was released into oblivion.

They left Kgam'ma where he lay and went after the two females and captured them as well.

Kgam'ma was stretched on the floor of the truck and it seemed that the glare in his eyes was fixed on them even in unconsciousness with a total and eternal enmity. They measured him from nose to the end of his brush, they looked in his jaws and treated his ears for bush-ticks. Barnabas lanced the suppurating fore-pad, drew out the thorn and drained the wound, and into the quivering muscle of the lion's huge haunch he injected a veterinary charge of penicillin. He also branded with a hot iron on his rump the identity number 17.

Eleven hours later on the dry Auob river the three lions came back to consciousness. Two springbok had been shot and left for them. Kgam'ma steadied himself and slowly he licked with a rasp tongue the healing wound in his paw.

He stayed, not moving far from the sweet waterhole with the two lionesses. And he waited. Each of the females in turn had three cubs. Daily they killed an oryx or a blue wildebeest. The rangers spotted Kgam'ma once only at long range through binoculars and the trackers sometimes picked up his spoor. Then the lion moved by night unseen and unknown to another waterhole in the bitter Nossob river, taking his group with him.

Simeon walked with his son at his side. They were talking about something and laughed so that Simeon's blue eyes retreated into small twinkling chips. He was unarmed as his habit was, but Barnabas carried a quickfiring Winchester rifle over the crook of his arm. Henrik walked a little behind and to the left of them. Bluebush and vaalkameel thorns grew in the

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river bed and the pale raisin-bushes were flecked with yellow and red berries. It had rained weeks before and there were patches of red-dark gemsbokgrass in full seed like blood blots against the ash-grey dust.

Henrik clicked his tongue and at the same time the two others saw the ears of a lion above a patch of scrub near a fallen thorn branch. It was not twenty yards off.

"All right, back out," Simeon said. "I'll watch it. It won't attack."

"Oubaas, it is Kgam'ma," the Bushman said.

"He's not going to attack. Back away."

Henrik and Barnabas began stepping slowly backwards. Barnabas had his gun ready, watching the lion and glancing for a flash at his father. They had saved the lion from death, yet he was deeply afraid of it.

"I'd better kill it, Pa," he said in a low voice.

"No, keep going. It's not stirring."

Simeon took off his hat so the lion would get that first if it attacked. He kept his stare without blinking on the animal's yellow eyes and it stared back. The other two were moving off silently in the dust.

The lion turned away its head suddenly, rose to its feet and walked silently off. Simeon watched it go. He took out a handkerchief and wiped his face and put his hat on again. The lion went on thirty paces or so to a further bush and disappeared behind it.

"All right, get away quick," Simeon turned to the others. When he looked back an instant later he saw Kgam'ma rise and bound forward. He was making a charge.

"Here he comes, Barnabas!" He braced himself for a side-spring. The lion's jaw dropped to roll out its terrifying roar of the kill.

Barnabas fired at the same instant past his father's shoulder. He shot twice in quick succession and the lion spun to the left and rolled, kicking like a great spring. Then it lay on one side with its flank and haunch quivering and the brand-mark 17 clearly visible on the dusty hide.

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None of them said anything. Henrik waited until the quivering stopped and he went up cautiously to the dead body. He squatted at arm's length from it, touched the ear. He pulled a few hairs from the long, tawny mane and wound them round one finger. ''Hai, you drinker at the bitter waterhole,'' he said.

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W.S. Merwin

THE REAPER

The harvest was over. Even the scythe had not been mine. I had nowhere to go.

In the evening I found a girl lying on the ground like a sheaf of wheat, radiant and silent. When I bent over her she was watching me, smiling.

I carried her into an empty house among the trees. Next to the kitchen there was a room with a bed and a colored quilt. I put her there and stood between two sources of light, and the room was brighter than the day outside.

She is helpless. She cannot speak. I will take care of her.

It is her house. I learned that from a woman who came to the door almost at once, and called to the girl, and tried to trick me, charm me, frighten me, get rid of me. When she went away, she left under the bushes by the house a rabbit from the mown fields, pretending to be dead, pretending to be half-skinned, to have no eyelids, so that it can watch what I do.

It has watched me before. I will not leave.

When I shut my eyes I see the wheat.

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Brian Swann

HELIOPOLIS

Up in the mountains, deep gorges had split the rock into sharp knives. A whole civilization lived up there, where the sky was so blue it seemed to exist in depth for ever. Their cities (and I was never able to discover if, in fact, they had any) could not be seen. They were a plentiful people, very active and ingenious. Across the chasms they had slung bridges of wooden planks. Some of these bridges were very unsteady and even had planks missing or torn up from the middle. The people just sidestepped these gaps or walked round them, even when the bridge was swaying in a high wind.

I only went there once, many years ago, after I had come across a book in the Rare Book Room of my university. It was an account of a journey undertaken by a young Englishman in the service of Sukran Pasha over two hundred years ago, and in passing he mentioned an area high in the Tauro chain which had contained a great city not even Alexander had been able to reduce, even though he beseiged it for eight months. The city, said John Beaumont, had since disappeared, probably fallen into the very mountain that had been its salvation. This city haunted me all through my middle years. After my retirement, I stole the book from the library and set out. After two or three false starts up false mountains; after being given false directions by local inhabitants anxious to turn me aside; after a number of months wandering around a surprisingly fertile countryside, I finally hit the right direction, and started climbing.

I remember that the path I struggled up was no more than two handsbreadths wide at many points, and that sarcophagi, overturned by some ancient earthquake, had shepherds asleep inside them. One whole slope of the mountain, just

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under the snow line, was a necropolis. I was terrified at the absolute pitch of the wind and the rapid declivities which undercut the path. It was getting harder to breathe. My breath came in tight gasps and my loneliness would bring tears to my eyes. But with a persistence that astonished me I gained the enormous heights overlooking the sea under the clouds, and which commanded all the passes into the rich continent to the east. There was still further to scramble, however, and my supplies were exhausted. Imagine my joy, then, when after the fifth day I looked up and saw a large white archway. My breath almost stopped as I walked through it. And then I'm sure it did stop, for however short a time. The whole mountain was alive.

There was a railroad linking the white peaks, and it ran along a wooden suspension bridge, up and down, swaying in the gusts. Later I learned that few people use this railroad. They spend most of their time swinging on long ropes over drops of thousands of feet. They swing higher and higher on thick ropes, standing on the planks and pumping hard with their legs so that they often seem about to swing right over. But they always begin the descent before the apex. I stayed with these people for a year, and saw that they swung almost all day, one after the other, at any time of the day, but most particularly at sundown, when the sun splashes out of sight behind the massive peak they call Gerdü Dayg (The Old Man).

In all my travels I cannot recall ever seeing a happier people. Their children made up quarrels as soon as they started them, and of course they would always have something to do. Those afflicted by grief, anger, old age, would swing as if their lives depended on it. There are no families, and all people of all ages swing together so that it looks, when the light is right, as if the whole mountain is in motion or like whole flocks of swallows swooping and soaring. Some played pipes as they swung. Everything was music and motion.

Only once did I irritate them with my constant

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questioning. After my initial delight had settled, I asked one of their number who was resting on a grassy verge: "Wasn't it dangerous, all this treading air and swinging over valleys?" At first, she didn't understand my question. Then, after a while, she said: "But this swinging on air, it is just as natural as swimming, and no more dangerous than walking on water."

It was a long time ago.

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Pat Nolan

STICK 'EM UP

". . . and so I drove home
without a thought in my head."
—Keith Abbott

Keith, at the time, was living in an old warehouse just across the freeway from downtown, right at the exit ramp. There was a long asphalt driveway that ran up to the huge double door that was his front door, and there was one exactly like it across the warehouse; the same kind of door and driveway leading out and down to the street again. For some reason people thought that the front drive was an entrance ramp to the freeway. One scorching day we were sitting in the living room, Keith had both doors open to let what little air there was circulate, and a Jaguar drove through. It was maddening. The Jag ran over the footstool my feet had been resting on. Luckily for me, I was up getting myself a drink of water. But Keith didn't take this kind of thing sitting down. He put up signs, but vandals tore them down. About the only thing he could do was have the city install a green light with an arrow to point the proper direction; the one thing drivers would pay attention to. But, of course, there was a lot of red tape involved, and besides, we had suspicions that the city fathers wanted Keith out of there so they could tear the warehouse down and build another freeway. There was a light already there, but it was just a regular red, yellow, and green traffic light. And when the light turned green. . . . You guessed it, a car would drive up to the huge double door, and if the door was closed, the driver would lean on the horn until Keith came out and opened the door. They'd drive through the living room and wait for him to open the back door,

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sometimes asking for a drink of water or a light for their cigarettes. Keith began charging toll, but after being robbed three times in the same night, he thought better of it. The cars kept coming. It was ridiculous! One night, Michael-Sean and I were visiting Keith when we heard a knock on the back door. Keith answered it. It was an old, grizzled man with a hand truck, the kind they used to move things around with in warehouses. He wanted to ride down on the front ramp on the hand truck. Keith let him. "He's a regular," he said.

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Michael Benedikt

ORDERS FROM BEYOND

(1) I don't know about your boss, but my particular employer is certainly exacting. For example: Not too long ago the orders came down from above: no more of this sloppy filing, no more of these simpleminded rectangles and neat but inappropriate manila folders. From now on everything you file information on has to be made of the same material you are filing the information about; and also, it has to be in the same shape as the thing you are filing the information about. Thus (the boss told me), information on metals, must be made out of metal, plaster out of plaster, and water out of water. Only information on manila file folders can henceforth be filed in manila file folders. "Sure, boss," I said. (2) As luck would have it, the first subject I was supposed to manufacture a file for, was an octopus. It was only a partial success, at best. Also, after I manufactured this first file, the octopus took a liking to me, grabbed me and hugged me like a mother. A sympathetic office-boy had to separate us. (3) The second subject was "heavy winds," and these blew me all over the room. Even my former file folders, which I had been relying on just in case of emergency, became somewhat of a mess. (4) The third subject the boss asked me to file was information on the nature of the universe. By the time I finished this job, a full week plus a weekend of overtime had passed; but on the eighth day, I rested.

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7/7/64 C

I

I get the willies every time I think back to the day I came home early and saw my father in bed with my mother. Perhaps it was that day which left me with my fear of opening doors and my dread of closed ones. Even at work, where I have been so long now and am doing so well, the sight of a closed office door is enough to make me suspect that something is happening inside that will affect me unpleasantly; if I'm tired from ~~work~~ a night of lies or booze, I can almost smell disaster flooding ~~out~~ toward me through the opaque glass pane, and my hands may shake and my voice may come out strange. I wonder why. Maybe it was the discovery that we were poor, which came to me late in childhood, that made me the way I am. Or maybe it was the day my father died and left me feeling conspicuous, because I knew I was just about the only boy in the whole neighborhood

Manuscript page from Something Happe

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The Art of Fiction LI

Joseph Heller

Jill Krementz

This interview with Joe Heller took place during the week of the publication of Something Happened*—a literary event of considerable significance since the novel is only the second of the author's career. The first, of course, was* Catch-22*, the war novel which after a slow start became the literary sensation of the late 50's and 60's. The fact that it has taken so much time to produce a second work of fiction seems of small concern to Heller since he has evolved a definite and unique pattern of work which is not at all determined by deadlines and other arbitrary demands. He says he always wanted to be a writer. His earliest story was pecked out on a neighborhood boy's typewriter and ultimately rejected by the* Daily News *short-*

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short story editor. His career moved at its own pace. He did no writing during his war years in Italy. His first accepted story appeared in The Atlantic Monthly *(along with a companion piece of fiction by James Jones) in 1948.* Catch-22 *wasn't published until ten years later. Heller has no illusions about the difficulty of making a living as a novelist. He tells his creative writing class at CCNY at the start of every academic year that even if every word a writer writes is published, he will almost surely have to supplement his income, usually by teaching (as Heller does), or perhaps by marrying money. The exigencies of such a career do not seem to have marked Heller himself. He sits very much at ease—an impressive figure (his considerable crop of hair seems to surround his face like a lion's ruff), trim (he keeps himself in firm shape by jogging and sticking to a strict diet), and with the detachment of someone talking about a third person he begins describing in a voice strong with the inflections of his native Brooklyn the unique process through which his novels have come to him. . . .*

HELLER

In 1962 I was sitting on the deck of a house on Fire Island. I was frightened. I was worried because I had lost interest in my job then—which was writing advertising and promotion copy. *Catch-22* was not making much money. It was selling steadily (eight hundred to two thousand copies a week)—mostly by word-of-mouth—but it had never come close to the *N.Y. Times* best-seller list. I had a wife and two children. I had no idea for another book. I was waiting for something to happen(!), wishing I had a book to start. My novels begin in a strange way. I don't begin with a theme, or even a character. I begin with a first sentence that is independent of any conscious preparation. Most often nothing comes out of it: a sentence will come to mind that doesn't lead to a second sentence. Sometimes it will lead to thirty sentences which then come to a dead end. I was alone on the deck. As I sat there worrying and wondering what to do, one of those first lines suddenly came to mind: "In the office in which I work, there are four people of

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whom I am afraid. Each of these four people is afraid of five people.'' Immediately, the lines presented a whole explosion of possibilities and choices—characters (working in a corporation), a tone, a mood of anxiety, or insecurity. In that first hour (before someone came along and asked me to go to the beach) I knew the beginning, the ending, most of the middle, the whole scene of that particular ''something'' that was going to happen; I knew about the brain-damaged child, and especially, of course, about Bob Slocum, my protagonist, and what frightened him, that he wanted to be liked, that his immediate hope was to be allowed to make a three-minute speech at the company convention. Many of the actual lines throughout the book came to me—the entire ''something happened'' scene with those solar plexus lines (beginning with the doctor's statement and ending with ''Don't tell my wife'' and the rest of them) all coming to me in that first hour on that Fire Island deck. Eventually I found a different opening chapter with a different first line (''I get the willies when I see closed doors'') but I kept the original, which had spurred everything, to start off the second section.

INTERVIEWER

Was it the same process of ''receiving'' a first line with *Catch-22*?

HELLER

Just about. I was lying in bed in my four-room apartment on the West Side when suddenly this line came to me: ''It was love at first sight. The first time he saw the chaplain, Someone fell madly in love with him.'' I didn't have the name Yossarian. The chaplain wasn't necessarily an army chaplain—he could have been a *prison* chaplain. But as soon as the opening sentence was available, the book began to evolve clearly in my mind—even most of the particulars . . . the tone, the form, many of the characters, including some I eventually couldn't use. All of this took place within an hour and a half. It got me so excited that I did what the cliché says you're supposed to

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do: I jumped out of bed and paced the floor. That morning I went to my job at the advertising agency and wrote out the first chapter in long hand. Before the end of the week I had typed it out and sent it to Candida Donadio, my agent. One year later, after much planning, I began chapter two.

INTERVIEWER

Is there any accounting for this unique procedure?

HELLER

I don't understand the process of imagination—though I know that I am very much at its mercy. I feel that these ideas are floating around in the air and they pick me to settle upon. The ideas come to me; I don't produce them at will. They come to me in the course of a sort of controlled daydream, a directed reverie. It may have something to do with the disciplines of writing advertising copy (which I did for a number of years) where the limitations involved provide a considerable spur to the imagination. There's an essay of T.S. Eliot's in which he praises the disciplines of writing, claiming that if one is forced to write within a certain framework the imagination is taxed to its utmost and will produce its richest ideas. Given total freedom, however, the chances are good that the work will sprawl.

INTERVIEWER

Can you remember some other opening lines. . . ?

HELLER

Well, people have always asked what happened to Dunbar, a character who disappeared in *Catch-22*. So I was thinking of writing a novel about him. The opening line I came up with was obviously cultivated by an advertising slogan for Bigelow rugs that was widespread at the time: *a name on the door, deserves a Bigelow on the floor*. My variation of it was, "Dunbar woke up with his name on the door, and a Bigelow on the floor, and wondered how he had got there. . . ." So it

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was a novel about amnesia, Dunbar finding himself in a plush office, not knowing the secretary's name, or how many people were working for him, or what his position was—and gradually finding out. It did not work. I couldn't take it my mind past a certain point.

INTERVIEWER

Do you have last lines that come along with those first lines?

HELLER

I had a closing line for *Something Happened* before I began writing the book. It was: "I am a cow." For six years I thought that was good. I had it on one of my 3x5 notecards. Then I wasn't all that happy with it, and finally I discarded it. But it seemed good at the time, and besides I can't start writing until I have a closing line.

INTERVIEWER

Once you have an opening (and closing) line in mind, what dictates whether you will continue?

HELLER

I think writers move unconsciously toward what they think they can do. The two novels I have written, *Catch-22* and *Something Happened*, I chose to write and write in the way I did because of an instinctive feeling that I could handle the subject matter and the method of dealing with each of them. I have certain gifts. I can be funny—for one-half a page at a time, sometimes even more, though I wouldn't want to push my luck and try to be funny for 10, I can be humorous in several ways—with irony, with dialogue, with farcical situations, and occasionally with a lucky epigram or an aphorism. My inclination though is to be serious. But on the other hand, I cannot write an effective straight-forward, separate narrative. I can't write description. I've told my editor that I couldn't write a good descriptive metaphor if my life depended on it. In *Catch-22* there is really very little physical description. There is

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very little in *Something Happened*. Bob Slocum tends to consider people in terms of one dimension; his tendency is to think of people—even those very close to him, his wife, daughter and son and those he works for—as having a single aspect, a single use. When they present more than that dimension, he has difficulty in coping with them. Slocum is not interested in how people look, or how rooms are decorated, or what flowers are around.

INTERVIEWER

Do you find it restricting to tell the novel through the limited *persona* of Bob Slocum?

HELLER

It's true that I myself could have been much funnier, much more intelligent, much cleverer with words than Slocum is. But I must limit him because if he had all my attributes he wouldn't be working for that company; he'd be writing *Catch-22*. Still, even though I can't have him talk like Neitzsche or Marcuse I have unlimited possibilities with him as long as I can establish the personality of someone who is only sure that he is sure of nothing. He is utterly unset, undefined, ambivalent. Thus, I can put him into any frame of mind, have him react from just about any emotional perspective. The opportunities were not too few but too many.

INTERVIEWER

Yes, but. . . .

HELLER

Besides, your question suggests that Slocum's function is to inform. I don't think, even as an author, that I have knowledge to give to readers. Philosophers might and scientists can. It's possible for me to express something that you can agree or disagree with, but certainly you will have heard it before. So I don't think the "what" distinguishes a good novel from a bad one but rather the "how"—the aesthetic quality of the

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sensibility of the writer, his craft, his ability to create and communicate.

I don't have a philosophy of life, or a need to organize its progression. My books are not constructed to "say anything." When I was at college, in every literary discussion there was always such an emphasis on "What does he say? What's the message?" Even then I felt that very few authors had anything to say. What was important to me was "What does it do?" This refutes, of course, the idea that the message is the objective of a novel. In fact, any 'message' becomes part of the texture, stirred so much that it's as negligible as a teaspoon of salt in a large stew. Think of the number of artists who have done still-lifes—a view of a river, or a vase of flowers . . . there is nothing about the choice of subject that is going to startle anybody. What will distinguish one still-life from another is what the artist brings to it. To a certain extent that is true of the novelist.

INTERVIEWER

What is your own feeling about Slocum?

HELLER

I told several people while I was writing the book that Slocum was possibly the most contemptible character in literature. Before I was finished, I began feeling sorry for him. That has happened to me before. That's why there are two generals in *Catch-22*. General Dreedle certainly had bad qualities, but then there were certain characteristics I liked (he was straightforward, honest, not a conniver) and I found I didn't want to attribute certain unsympathetic qualities to him. So I invented General Peckem as a sort of substitute scapegoat. Very hard to like *him*. But as for Slocum, many of my friends to whom I showed the book found not only compassion for him, but strong identification. That surprised me, but I suppose it shouldn't have. He *is* very human.

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INTERVIEWER

Does the reaction to your work often surprise you?

HELLER

Constantly. And I rely on it. I really don't know what I'm doing until people read what I've written and give me their reactions. I didn't know what *Catch-22* was all about until three months after it came out when people, often total strangers who had no interest in saying the right (or wrong) things to me, began coming up and talking about the book. It meant different things to them. I thought the Chaplain was the second most impressive character in the book (after Yossarian). But it turned out to be Milo. Then, it surprised me that things in *Catch-22* turned out to be very funny. I thought I was being humorous, but I didn't know I would make people laugh. In my apartment one day I heard this friend of mine in another room laughing out loud, and that was when I realized I could be comic. I began using that ability consciously—not to turn *Catch-22* into a comic work, but for contrast, for ironic effect. I really don't think authors know too much about the effect of what they're doing.

INTERVIEWER

Doesn't that bother you . . . that the author (you) has such a tentative grip. . . ?

HELLER

No. It's one of the things that makes it interesting. I would only be nervous if I were told that what I'd done was no good and no one would want to read it. I protect myself from that by submitting the first chapter to my agent, and to my editor, and after about 1/3 of the book is done, to other friends. They can be tough on me.

INTERVIEWER

Do you have an audience you keep in mind when you write?

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HELLER

Since writing is really performing for people, unconsciously I must have an audience I'm writing for—someone who is really me, I suppose, with my degree of sensibility, my level of education, my interest in literature. . . .

INTERVIEWER

What sort of a discussion do you have with your friends about your work as it's in progress?

HELLER

It's never a discussion. They simply tell me what they think is good or bad. I do not always believe them. I try not to talk about it to anyone for years. I think of writing as private enterprise . . . since so much comes from rumination; nothing is more personal than one's thoughts; I think I'd prefer to keep it that way.

INTERVIEWER

What are the best circumstances for this sort of ruminating?

HELLER

I have to be alone. A bus is good. Or walking the dog. Brushing my teeth is marvelous—it was especially so for *Catch-22*. Often when I am very tired, just before going to bed, while washing my face and brushing my teeth, my mind gets very clear . . . and produces a line for the next day's work, or some idea way ahead. I don't get my best ideas while actually writing . . . which is the agony of putting down what I think are good ideas and finding the words for them and the paragraph forms for them . . . a laborious process. I don't think of myself as a naturally gifted writer when it comes to using language. I distrust myself. Consequently I try every which way with a sentence, then a paragraph, and finally a page, choosing words, selecting pace (I'm obsessed with that, even the pace of a sentence). I say to myself what I hope to put down on paper, but I hope not aloud. I think sometimes I move my lips, not

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only when I'm writing, but when I'm thinking of what I'm going to be having for dinner.

INTERVIEWER

How long can you keep at it?

HELLER

I ordinarily write three or four handwritten pages and then rework them for two hours. I can work for four hours, or 45 minutes. It's not a matter of time. I set a realistic objective—how can I inch along to the next paragraph? Inching is what it is. It's not: How can I handle the next chapter? How can I get to the next stage in a way that I like? I think about that as I walk the dog or walk the twenty minutes from my apartment to the studio where I work.

INTERVIEWER

Do you put these ideas down as they occur to you?

HELLER

I keep a small sheath of 3x5 cards in my billfold. If I think of a good sentence, I'll write it down. It won't be an idea ("have him visit a brothel in New Orleans"). What I put down is an actual line of intended text ("In the brothel in New Orleans was like the time in San Francisco"). Of course, when I come back to it, the line may change considerably. Occasionally, there's one that sings so perfectly the first time that it stays, like "My boy has stopped speaking to me and I don't think I can bear it." I wrote that down on a 3x5 card, perhaps on a bus, or after walking the dog. I store them in filing cabinets. The file on *Something Happened* is about four inches deep, the one on *Catch-22* about the length of a shoe-box.

INTERVIEWER

Are there card files for unfinished work—like the Dunbar book you mentioned. . . ?

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HELLER

No. I don't unfinish anything I start—and I don't start—as I've said—until I see the whole thing in my head.

INTERVIEWER

What are some of the other sources for material?

HELLER

I pick up a lot from friends. Mel Brooks. George Mandel. Especially Mandel. He talked about his experiences in the war. Once he told me about talking to an army psychiatrist who asked him about his dreams and George made one up about holding a fish in his hand. That's a bit in *Catch-22*. I've picked up a lot from him. He had the oddest medical ailment at one time—a stone in his salivary gland. It's very rare. And we can conclude that it was a very *small* stone. Well, it turns up in the hospital scene about the mixed-up records in *Catch-22*. Just a year ago Mandel suddenly became aware that Schraffts no longer existed in New York and that the *World-Telegram* wasn't being published any more—somehow he hadn't noticed—and he said, "My God, soon there'll be nothing left." That went down on one of those 3x5 cards and was used in one of Bob Slocum's digressions in *Something Happened*. He's been very helpful.

INTERVIEWER

What about the influences from your reading?

HELLER

Every once in a while I can identify an influence. There's a page and a half in *Something Happened* which I wrote during my Jamesian period . . . the use of the word "ah?" When Slocum tells the psychiatrist he doesn't have auditory hallucinations but thinks he smells excrement, the psychiatrist says "ah?" a number of times. It's out of *The Ambassadors*. The influence is not especially pronounced.

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I- DEATH

II

How shall I die?
Let me count the
ways.

WAKING UP

Waking up is such a
complicated act and many
I'm surprised we are able
to accomplish it every
morning while we are
still half asleep

I—

Says "I love you" to
other girls

VIRGINIA

Once it hit me that
I could do everything
I wanted to for, I
was unable to do anything

SEQUENCE

... and the doctor said "He will
never speak."

It is not fair that glaucous
children are beautiful, or the parents
of their parents

OTHER MAN

Wife (or GOLF COURSE)

"Oh, don't worry about him. If
he was anyone to be afraid of, I
wouldn't be here with you. Come on.
Come on."

It occurs to me now that to
my own wife, I might not be a man
to be afraid of.

3 x 5 note cards for Something Happened

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+ WEIRD OBSERVATIONS

ACCIDENT ✓

TOM HUNT

"Something happened" answers Bob

Finds Tom in pain, screaming in terror. Thinks he is dying + can't stand to see him suffer, so he turns his face to the wall + smothers him

CORONER'S REPORT ✓

"Death due to asphyxiation"

The policeman answers and asks Bob's wife if Bob has any enemies. She starts weeping and says "Don't tell my wife."

BOY X

I don't want him back. I don't want to live him. I do

HOME-OFFICE

Now I wish to ask you this question: Which is worse, my home or my office? Or are they really the same?

BOY X

It's odd. When I picture him older, I picture him exactly the way he is now. I can think of a future for him.

But I can't see one

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INTERVIEWER

What about personal contact with contemporary writers? Is that of use?

HELLER

I don't think writers are comfortable in each other's presence. We can talk, of course, for five minutes or so, but I don't think we want to socialize. There's always an acute status consciousness relating to how high or low a writer exists in the opinion of the person he's talking to. I've noticed that the opening gambit in conversation between two writers—and I'm always very uncomfortable hearing it—is, "I like your work." I've heard it so often. It's so condescending. What if the person had not done any work?: he would not be spoken to at all. This sort of relationship is peculiar to writers—after all our status is never challenged by anyone else, one's jeweler, or a dress-manufacturer. No, I don't think two novelists who have enjoyed a high measure of success can exist into their middle years living close to each other if both continue writing—I don't believe human nature can accept such a situation. The fact is there are few people with whom I would want to spend even a full weekend . . . to be in the same house or on a fishing trip with, unless I knew them well enough to go off by myself if I want to. I don't want to have to entertain them. In a novel you can't spend sixty pages writing about that sort of relationship.

INTERVIEWER

You wouldn't go on a fishing trip with Bob Slocum?

HELLER

No.

INTERVIEWER

How close is *Something Happened* to your own experience?

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HELLER

Neither of my books was intended to be autobiographical. Both were based to a certain extent on experience—*Something Happened* is about someone who works in a company (which I have done) and who has a family (which I have), but it's also based to a great extent on my experience as an observer of other people and a reader of other writers. It's an imaginative work, after all—the most important ingredient in writing fiction *is* that *choice* is always available: *Who will? What will?* I told my wife and children years ago when they knew what *Something Happened* was about that they might think it was an expose of their family life, and I told them—truthfully—that it was not about them. I did not feel (I said this half-facetiously to my wife) that she was interesting enough, or for that matter, that I myself was, to write a novel about.

I have had no experience with a brain-damaged child. But it turns out that the insecurity Bob Slocum feels not knowing how to deal with it, is typical of parents who *do* have that experience . . . what's called 'denial'—the refusal to accept the condition. Every time Slocum starts talking about the child he starts digressing—and it's an accurate reaction.

INTERVIEWER

How do you compare the two novels?

HELLER

I think one difference between the two books is that *Catch-22* is concerned with physical survival against exterior forces or institutions that want to destroy life or moral self. *Something Happened* is concerned very much with interior, psychological survival in which the areas of combat are things like the wishes a person has, whether they are fulfilled or not, the close intimate situations we have with our children when they're small and as they grow older, the memories we have of our relationship with parents as *they* grow older—these are some of the areas of disturbance in *Something Happened*. Of course, these areas are much more difficult to deal with than

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those in *Catch-22*. Given an Adolph Hitler or inefficient, or corrupt people, or people without sensibilities, we know what the dangers are, and we know what we must try to do. There's a line in *Something Happened*: "It was after the war that the struggle began."

INTERVIEWER

How long did it take you to write the climactic passage about the "something" which happens at the end of *Something Happened?*

HELLER

Two minutes. It had all been done years before sitting on that deck in Fire Island.

INTERVIEWER

Do titles come to you easily?

HELLER

There have only been a few. "Something Happened" turned up in the fall of '63 when I was walking with George Mandel past Korvettes or Brentanos and a kid came running past and yelled over his shoulder to another, "Hey come on, *something's happened*"—some sort of traffic accident I guess it must have been.

INTERVIEWER

You've spoken about music being important while you are working?

HELLER

It overcomes those noises that might distract me—a leaking faucet, my daughter's rock music in the other part of the apartment, or someone else's radio across the courtyard. I have tapes. I mostly listen to Bach, his choral music. Beethoven is OK; he's great, but Bach, for me, is the best.

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INTERVIEWER

What about the necessary disciplines of writing?

HELLER

Well, I don't have social luncheons with people. By not having lunch with people, it means that I do not have two martinis, which usually means the afternoon is not shot, since all I can do after two martinis is read the newspaper.

INTERVIEWER

Still, a considerable amount of time. . . .

HELLER

I am a mysteriously slow writer. I say "mysteriously" because there is no accounting for it. I didn't start working on *Something Happened* until two years after that day on the Fire Island deck. In the meantime I started a musical comedy, wrote the final screenplay for *Sex and the Single Girl*, and then a television thing that turned out to be a sort of pilot of *McHale's Navy*—none of this especially serious stuff. Then the play *We Bombed in New Haven* took me away—not the writing of it (that only took six weeks)—but the time spent working on the two productions. All this delay turned out to be for the better. When I went back to the 250 pages I'd managed to get down on paper over those two years, I was able to write the book the way I wanted. I had learned more, and read more. The original forty pages became 120 pages; the thirty pages of the second section became 80; the 70 pages on the wife became 100—all of it much different in texture and mood to what I originally had in mind. It has happened with each novel. Originally, I didn't think *Catch-22* could be long enough to be more than a novelette. The addition became not padding, but substance with a meaning and quality of its own. I missed my deadline for *Catch-22* by four or five years. I felt that it was the only book I was going to write, so I wanted to do it as well as I could. Actually, I wasn't ever sure I was going to be a writer. When I started *Catch-22*, I thought writing novels

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might be a useful way to kill time. I remember thinking that when I had the book one third done and my agent was showing it to editors, that if they all had said, "No," I would not have finished the book. I don't have that narcissistic drive, the megalomania involved in spending years working on a book that no one was really interested in publishing. As it happened, there was no difficulty in finding a publisher. *Catch-22*, by the way, was the first novel I'd ever started.

INTERVIEWER

Has success changed your attitude about living or writing?

HELLER

I don't think so. And one reason is that it came to me so late. I don't think it's good to achieve too much at too early an age. What else can the future give you if you've already got all that your imagination has dreamt up for you? A writer is only discovered once in a lifetime, and if it happens very early the impossibility of matching that moment again can have a somewhat corrosive effect on his personality and indeed on the work itself.

INTERVIEWER

It seems to be a peculiarly American dilemma.

HELLER

It stems from a fundamental insecurity that afflicts successful Americans, particularly those who are self-made and have succeeded in a field in which there is a high element of risk. They never feel that they deserve their success, or that it is permanent; in fact they seem to fear that their next book is going to cost them everything that they've gained . . . sort of like doubling up at roulette . . . betting on the black five times in a row. Actors suffer the same way. They can't believe it when they are successful. They're positive that an angel looking like Claude Rains is going to appear and say that a mistake has been made and "we're taking it all away from you." I'm not im-

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mune to it myself. It bothers me tremendously. But I like to think I'm over the hurdle. If I had finished my two books by the age of 28, well I'd have a lot to worry about. That's not enough. But two books at age fifty-one means that the next one won't be due until I'm nearly seventy. I can coast for quite a while.

INTERVIEWER

Could you imagine not starting up again?

HELLER

If I thought I might never get an idea for another novel—one of those lines dropping in that provides a whole book—I don't think it would distress me. I've got two books under my belt now. I would be content to consider that a lifetime's work and I could just putter around and find other things to do. I've been very lucky. I've written two books that were unusual and unusually successful.

INTERVIEWER

When did you begin writing?

HELLER

I wanted to be a writer when I was in the sixth grade—of course I wanted to be one without working at it. I wanted to be published in the *New York Daily News* which published one short story a day in those days, or in *The New Yorker*. I remember writing a story about the Russian invasion of Finland, and sending it to the *Daily News*, which, of course, rejected it. I was eleven years old. All my writing was imitative of what I was reading—the magazines that my older brother or sister would bring home, what the circulating libraries carried out in Coney Island where we lived—why, I think I can remember Jerome Weidman's work in the 1930's better than he does. In 1948 when my first story came out in *The Atlantic* and nearly won the "Atlantic First," I thought I was pretty hot stuff. About that same time, Norman Mailer's *The Naked and the Dead*

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was published and he was on the cover of *Saturday Review*. We were about the same age—26 or 27—and it put me in my place.

INTERVIEWER

What about other fields of writing? Have you considered non-fiction.

HELLER

I don't do non-fiction well, and since I work so hard at writing, I might as well concentrate on what I know I can do. I'm too conscious of myself as a writer to be a journalist. I'm a show-off. When I write I want people to notice me and that I'm doing something different from other people. A journalist—at least the ones I admire—is a writer who can make me forget his involvement so that I can concentrate on the subject of the piece, not the personality of the author. The journalist and the novelist have completely different intelligences. Journalists almost always compose on typewriters. They rarely do more than one draft. Somehow they think in terms of openings, development, conclusion—all in almost automatic sequences. I envy that gift. But if I had it, I'd be a journalist. You can't have it both ways.

INTERVIEWER

Have you had any of those first lines come to mind since finishing *Something Happened*?

HELLER

Dozens! I think when a book is finished and the editor likes it, and it's been handed in, an author goes through a period of nervous craziness. Some writers invest in Canadian Uranium stocks; others change agents or wives or commit suicide. Some writers hear "voices." It's not a good time in which to trust one's own judgment. The author has been too busy and intent. I remember one first line that came to me during this time was, "The kid, they say, was born in a manger, but

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frankly I have my doubts.'' It's not a bad line, but I wouldn't think a book would come out of it . . . I did go further for a while, and I liked the idea, but it led me ultimately to remember Eliot's opening line about the Magi coming to the manger in, I think, ''Ash Wednesday''—''a cold coming we had of it''—and I gave it up after that. So I guess I'll have to wait around for another line to drop in. . . .

—GEORGE PLIMPTON

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Stefan Mihal's Suitcase

A NOTE ON STEFAN MIHAL

The character of Stefan Mihal has functioned partly as a red herring and partly as a doppelganger for photographer Michals. His name derives from Michals' middle and last names in their original Czech form.

His "birth" is coincident both in time and place with those of the photographer yet it is uncertain whether the two have in fact met. Duane is ambivalent on this subject, but he has said that if the two of them ever met, it would be like matter meeting anti-matter: there would be an explosion.

He views Stefan as one of his own untried possibilities as a person, often conceiving of him as an insurance salesman (to whom chance has assigned a different role from that of Michals). He works as an emblem of Michals' persistent questioning of reality.

—F.H.

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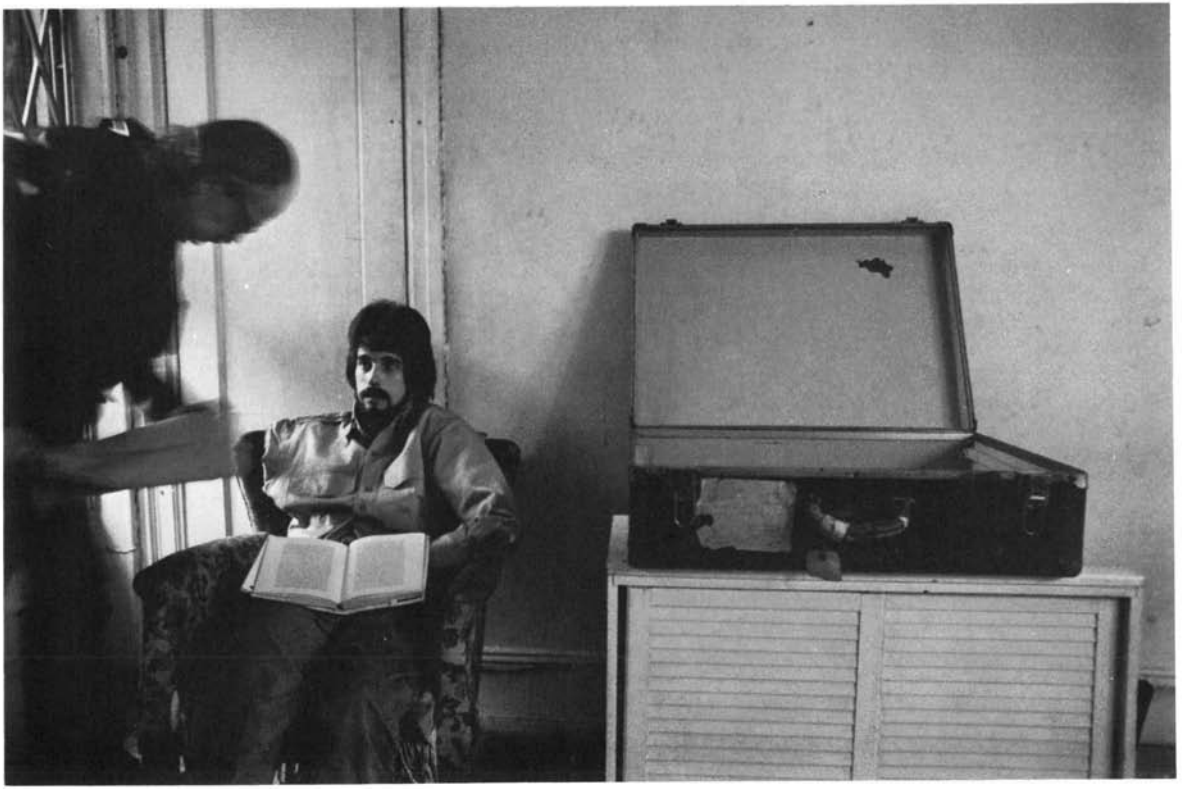

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Herbert Gold

Max and the Pacemaker

Port-au-Prince has become an amputated town, throbbing in upon itself. Grief muffles the rhythms of this Caribbean port city—tourists gone, trade vanished, a crazed dictator pressing the Haitian millions into misery. Still, amid desolation and dismay, the smell of ripe mangoes is good, sun and salt are good, the sway of Creole girls as they go about their day is a happy reminder of time that was and time still to come—why not?

Or so my friend Max Liptzen, the fish importer, explained to me. Someday the walls of the Fort Dimanche prison would be torn down and bamboche would take the dancers once more. And then, he said, the living will regret giving up life before they have to. "This is a country for people with juice in them. Let's squeeze the juice, kid."

Convinced by Max's argument on a particularly sweet and humid evening, I wanted to pay a visit to the house of flowers known as The Flamingo, just beyond city limits in the district called Carrefour. I suggested the expedition partly to distract

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Max, who was one of the few foreigners to remain in Haiti after many years of the capricious and brutal regime of Francois Duvalier. The phrase "house of flowers" is a sweeter name for what in other places is called BAR! DANCE!! GIRLS!!! A place for talk, dance, and putting away the cares of the world; also a place for catching an assortment of penicillin-resistant diseases, nostalgia, weltschmerz, and weariness with the self. He needed distraction for the long night stretching ahead. He didn't answer me.

Because of the general decay of life in Haiti—roads, electricity, telephone, police—Max had given up his house and was rattling about the Grand Hotel Oloffson, as was I. The tourist business was moribund. We became rapid easy friends, in the fashion of travelers on shipboard or marooned in hotels, but this night was a difficult one for Max Liptzen. News by cable that his mother was dying in Brooklyn and the next flight out of Port-au-Prince was two days away. He needed to survive until then. A broad-faced, deeply-tanned man—that mahogany weathering of the dweller in the tropics who has retained his northern love of the sun—Max had played football for the Texas Aggies (scholarship), spent the war in the Marines (sergeant), wandered New York looking for a crevice in which his lazy, free-swinging spirit might pass its time, and finally cast himself up on the beach in Haiti. There he found play for his talents—a bit of business, a bit of monkey business—and lived easy and hard, married several times, and gave the world a number of children in assorted colors. Two of his children were now in school in the States, living with their separate mothers. And now his hair was thinning, too much salt water, too much sun; and he blacked what remained with a Dominican product guaranteed to restore youth. The heavy shoulders were sloped with flesh; belly pressed over and around belt, no matter how he worked at the Royal Canadian Air Force exercises. And his mother, to whom he remained faithful as only a lazy, playful New York boy is faithful, was dying far away and out of reach.

"I thought heart is for men?" he asked. "Isn't it usually

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cancer for women, or the sugar diabetes?''

''Well, not much difference anymore.''

''Not much difference between men and women?'' He threw back his head and roared at his joke. The ritual laughter was called up by the idea of a joke; nothing to do with his feelings.

''No, I meant—''

''She's only sixty-seven,'' he said. ''Can't they put in one of those pacemakers I read about in *Time*? For the heart? I get the Latin-American edition. Aren't there lots of things they can do if it's only a young woman like that, just sixty-seven? I bet they're putting in one of those new pacemakers.''

During the afternoon, after receiving the cable, Max took a long shower. Tami ben Missa, his current companion, a plump Syrian widow who ran a souvenir shop on the Boulevard Harry-Truman, reported that he had wept his heart out. ''I saw it myself,'' she said, as if she had seen his heart. ''It was sad to me. It made me sad.'' She was familiar with tears, too; she had wept when her husband died, leaving her defenseless, and she also wept when the little purple worms crawled out of the mahogany salad bowls in her shop, leaving a powdery dust on the shelves. Mortality in all forms betrayed her. Normally the tourists were supposed to buy the mahogany before the worms found their way through the grain. Now there was no telling when they would buy again. And in the meantime, out of worry, she was getting fat; and because of Max's grief, she had again, for the third day in a row, dipped into the jar of imported peanut butter with the imported crackers after eating her lunch of measured calories. Max was no good to her at times like this.

After tears and shower, Max went down to the pool and lay with his leathery face and heavy, still-muscular body quivering under the Caribbean sun. Later, a reddish-bronze heap of flesh in the kerosene light of evening, stuffed with crayfish and avocado salad, he finally replied to my suggestion. ''Come on, kid, *my* treat for an evening at the Flamingo. Come on, I'm inviting. Come *on*!''

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He drove like a taxidriver, with that Haitian habit of turning off the ignition on slopes, in order to save gas, and accelerating around curves, in order to test the nerves. Working through Port-au-Prince in the evening was like fitting together a jigsaw puzzle. Besides the usual confusions of a town that has grown from a colonial port to a monument to human fertility—shantytowns of banana leaves woven through mud, suburbs of crates and boards, exurbs of piled debris—the Duvalier government had put roving gangs of Tonton Macoutes on guard against invasion, sedition, and unexplained loitering. The macoutes blocked off streets at random to confuse the devils; they stopped our car to demand "Inspection! In-spec-tion!" which meant: "Get out, let us feel you for weapons, pay up." When they searched us, huffing with excitement, they showed by the way they felt us and pinched us that it was spite, not civil caution, which sent them into this profession. The word "tonton macoute" means bogeyman. We paid a gourd, twenty cents, in order to pass on.

Few funlovers ventured out at night. Bars were closed or deserted. The Casino, bankrupt, was run by the state, and was empty. The ever-present crowds which live in the street—students studying beneath streetlamps, the homeless, the wandering, those who live "under the same sky like you do," as one beggar said—watched us pass and stared without the Haitian eagerness which I remembered from other times. The smell of Port-au-Prince, charcoal smoke and refuse and strong humanity, followed us down the rutted streets to the waterfront, and then a sea breeze swept through the covered jeep as we headed out toward Carrefour.

"These are some great girls," said Max. "Why is it I can't stand them more than once or twice, the same girl? You tell *me* that."

"I suppose you don't care much, pal."

"I don't understand how if they put that pacemaker thing in the heart, how they do if the battery runs down. Do they use a transistor?"

"They must."

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"That cruddy wife of mine in the Bronx, do you think she'll bring our kid to see her?"

"Maybe it depends on how sick—"

"Hell, it's a beautiful country, isn't it? Just look at it. This could be paradise."

"Yes."

"They use transistors for everything now, even radios, haha."

And then he fell into silence and tended to his driving. True, the solemn processions, the glowing blue-black of the seaside road, the flicker of fires and kerosene lamps and candles, and the pervading human warmth of evening give all who visit Haiti for more than a few days a special nostalgia for the night hours on this heart-testing, desperate island.

Just past the third set of barricades on the Carrefour road lay a clump of woods, palm trees, banana bushes, and a grove of mangoes. Abruptly Max turned the jeep down a mud road. In the lurching dark I could make out the dark shape of a house. It looked like the underside of a shipwreck in the churning sea of night, disturbed by birds and branches and swelling clouds. Our headlights caught the sign:

LE FLAMINGO
Welcome Friend and Visitor
La Bienvenue
The Flamingo Welcome You

"The Flamingo Happy Whore House and Discussion Club seems pretty dark," said Max. Irritably he honked his horn. A watchman came running on one foot, ambling on another, limping along.

"Go home! Go home!" he cried.

"Where are the girls?"

"No! No! No! Go home, please, I beg you, dear sirs."

"What's happened to everyone?"

The watchman struggled with a feeble grasp on French and sailor English, translating from his native Creole. "Pas clients!

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All lonesome! No do-do! Ever body in movies! Now you be nice and go home, please! No make trouble and break up joint!''

Max discussed the bad news with himself. The ladies had all been loaded into the truck for an outing to the movies. It wasn't even a dirty movie at the Rex, it was just ''Les Hot-Girls de Paris,'' a French striptease nudie picking up carfare in Port-au-Prince on its way to South America after the burlesque circuits of Ohio and Indiana.

For perhaps weeks there had been no customers, no drinkers, no kidders and talkers. The American tourists and sailors were long disappeared; the thirteen year old virgins were growing old and weary for lack of practice at the trade of being thirteen. Even the local business men and diplomats hated to go out at night. They were tired. There was no one looking for The Flamingo; there was no one in Haiti. So the girls were sad. But not too sad to enjoy a nice movie, and the boss had piled them into the tap-tap for a treat.

Max had been sad, but not too sad to visit the girls. That's what they were there for—to improve the sadness. And now they weren't there.

I was sad for Max the Fish Importer, whose mother lay in Mount Sinai hospital, gasping for breath, while her favorite and youngest son, straining all his muscles to reach her, was held up by Pan Am scheduling. In the golden age of tourism in Haiti, there had been two flights a day out of Bowen Field.

''But!'' cried the watchman, recognizing misery and a possible tip. ''But!'' It turned out that the Flamingo Annex down the road, another house of flowers, carried on during emergencies such as a mass visit to the movies. He had barely explained how to find it when Max, in one clean, athletic motion, gave him a gourd, put the jeep in reverse, and sent us, spinning mud, back onto the road toward the Flamingo Annex. It was called the G. Washington Bar & Girl, honoring the U.S. naval cruisers which used to put over in the bay of Port-au-Prince. The good old days when a Bar & Girl did good for the Good Neighbor policy. In those times, fantastic snow-

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falls were seen by tropical Port-au-Prince—a thick blanket of white from the passed-out sailor-suits containing passed-out sailors sleeping it off on the lawns of the G. Washington, the A. Lincoln, the Flamingo, the S.S. Lollypop, the Voodoo-Club, and the Choucounette, where lonely men gathered to console themselves for the absence of those they loved.

The G. Washington Bar & Girl had none of the undersea grace of the Flamingo. It was an Annex and little more. A decaying wooden house with the minimal grace of filigree and shutter, eave and pointed rooftops, it had been converted into a giant sounding board. As we approached, warned by the sound of the motor, it began to throb and pulsate. We saw lights flashing on, first the string of colored Christmas bulbs across the yard and porch, then the jukebox, then the bare bulbs in the rooms, and then the jewels in the eyes of the naked boy who ran out to greet us and hold an umbrella over our heads. It was not a wet evening. There was no rain. But an umbrella for dignity and to keep the dew from our hot brows.

And the girls were all over us like the dew on a plant left out to make its own way in nature. They ran and glittered. They took eager possession. They were gleaming, black, round, brown, and tan. They were loosely gowned in rope-secured frocks. There is a small town in Haiti which is famous for two qualities: the relatively light color of its inhabitants (its white colony did not leave after the revolution of 1804) and the single-minded intentions of its women. Many find favor in the bars along the Carrefour road. The best of these village girls have high rumps, jolly natures, and avaricious hearts—they are self-respecting whores. The jukebox boomed out its Chubby Checker beat; the ladies, who take their English neat, were mouthing the memorized words; Max was buying surcease from sorrow, rum and soda; and to keep from being hounded by a pack of ladies, I had chosen one of them to be my very own. I discovered, as my head filled with smoke, that I was dancing the twist.

"TWEEST! AN' TWEEST AGAIN!" my partner sang. "AN' TWEEST WAN MORE TIME!"

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All this for us? I recall thinking. Naked barboys running, girls chanting, sweat rolling, rum bottles clinking. On the wall, the portrait of Dr. Francois Duvalier, the swollen owl's face in black horn-rimmed glasses and topped by a homburg, like a voodoo priest, gazed down unblinkingly upon us. "The Great Protector," I said to my dancing partner.

"Ah oui oui oui," she said.

"Everyone has him on the wall," I said.

"Of course, he is the Great Protector."

I led her toward him by the arm, making as if to press her face against the photograph. "I've seen him on lots of walls," I said, "but I've never seen anybody kiss him."

She collapsed with the giggles. In Creole she reported my remark to the other girls and the barman. The girls howled. One cried out, "He never kiss me either," and the shrieks of laughter mounted afresh. The barman frowned and brought me a rum-soda on the house.

Max said without conviction, "You want to get me expelled?"

"Tweest again?" said my date. "An' we tweest again?"

The jukebox took off in stratospheric answer to her question. I went along for the ride. Watching her deal with the problem of weightfulness, I wanted to nominate her for lady astronaut. When the record was over, we held hands back to the table where Max was deep in conversation with another girl, a girl of about fifteen with a healthy high pout to everything, rump, breasts, lips. "We talk," I said to my lady.

"No no no! We go upstairs!"

"Talk!" I said.

"No,"—and then with sudden suspicion: "You seeck?"

"No."

"You t'ink I seeck? I no seeck. Fresh young t'ing. Inspection by docteur evair mont', and no jigajig busy-ness zis mont'. C'est la pagaie." She gazed at Max, busy downing one rum after another and talking, talking, talking to his lady. "He seeck?"

Perhaps unnerved by the music, the noise, the expectation

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of direct action, I told her that his mother was very ill in New York and he was awaiting the plane to take him there. She advised me to advise him to go upstairs with his lady in order to wile away the hours of waiting. This is the remedy for most problems, especially the ones for which there is no other remedy. But when the girls knew that we had come only to drink and talk, they made the best of it. They drank. They talked. Max was getting very drunk as he explained to a lady who spoke about twenty words of English, all learned from sailors, what the pacemaker does, how heart surgery has developed in recent years, and where New York lies in relation to Port-au-Prince, Cap-Haitien, Jacmel, Jeremie, and Port-de-Paix. Further north it lies. The pacemaker can lie to the north or the south of the heart. But it keeps the heart going with an electrical impulse conforming to the heart's own rhythm, the rhythm of a mother who loved her youngest son though he gave her no joy, only a succession of daughters-in-law and grandchildren, the grandchildren scattered, the daughters-in-law scattered, the son lost in a strange land with a business that bore no looking into. A fish business, but what kind of a fish business? A fishy business, she always said.

The girl sitting with Max asked him, "You like maybe my sister?"

I was telling my own lady about the United States, I was keeping an eye on Max. When she asked if I would take her to the United States, and I said maybe, she laughed scornfully. She didn't expect to get taken to the United States by a man who bought drinks but paid her no serious attention. She didn't even expect to get taken from Carrefour to Port-au-Prince, or from the Flamingo Annex to the Flamingo. She expected very little from life, and knew she would get less than she expected.

Then suddenly Max turned away from the girl listening with her elbows on that wobbly table and began to talk to me. "I've been married four times," he said. "My mother is dying. I make about seven-eight thousand a year here, but it goes as far as twenty in the States. Maybe about that far. And in the

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good years I made more, sometimes twice as much. But I could never keep up the support payments too good. My kids don't see me. I can't visit them much on what I make. I can't bring them down here. My mother, I always wrote to her, though. We kept in touch. We kept in touch. How can I keep in touch now?''

I asked if he would like to go back to the Oloffson. I offered to drive.

''No,'' he said.

Tears began to flow down the furrows of his sunburned cheeks.

''Yes,'' he said.

The girls followed us to the door. He was having trouble keeping on his feet. He was cursing the government of Francois Duvalier because Pan Am only flew out of Port-au-Prince three times a week.

Now I saw the same tears that his Syrian girlfriend had discovered on his face. But he was not ashamed of them. I was a stranger to him; the girls were strangers; they chattered and clucked and helped to push him into the jeep, just as if this were their customary job—to pack away a weeping American. ''I been married four times!'' he said to one of them.

She understood a little English. ''In one night?'' she asked. ''Oooh you beeg man. You come back when you feel better, yes? Gran' bamboche, we marry you four time in one night.''

There was the smell of charcoal smoke and rotting mangoes on the road.

Max asked me: ''What if my mother knew how I spend my time?''

I told him not to worry about it.

He turned to me again, seeming nearly sober in the darkness, first sticking his head out into the midnight coolness of the bayside road. He was giving thought to what the girl had told him. ''Listen,'' he said, ''if you're really in love, there's no limit. You know what it's like—really in love? Listen, if it's true love, hell, you're a man all the time. 'Be a man,' you say to yourself, and you're a man, just like that. When she looks at

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you with that look because she loves you. When you want to." He ran his hand through his thin hair. He looked at it in the dark as if the blacking might smudge his fingers. "My mother used to fly down sometimes for the home games," he said, "you know, in Texas there. Of course, the school paid her fare. They knew I liked to have her in the stands. I played better with her watching me."

"I know."

"Listen!" he said. We were stopped at a barricade by the ragged militia known as the Tonton Macoutes. They pointed their guns and shined their flashlights over us. Max held himself with dignity and let me do the talking. I paid the toll. Then he continued, dead sober.

"Listen," he said, "this is how I spent my whole life in this place. Since the war. Since 1948, that wasn't so long after the war. Since after I got done bumming around. I figured out how to import fish in barrels from Canada. Started with Norway, ended up with Canada. Dried. Salted. Industrial quality, it won't kill you. Okay, it made me some money. I didn't have to work much. Just organize it a little. Listen, I got married a lot. Kids all over. A couple brown kids, too. Now I can't fall in love anymore. Ma gets her a pacemaker, maybe she'll be all right, okay? You think so? Oh Christ. Oh God. I get out on Pan Am, Montego Bay, Idlewild, my brother meets me. Straight to the hospital and she'll ask me—Oh God in heaven keep her alive. But I don't know how to answer her. You know, kid? What I started to tell you about falling in love: *This is a place for hiding out*. That's all it is." He paused once more, trying to make his discovery for me so that he could make it for himself. "It's like this when you're in business all alone, like I am. You bite a lot. I'm a tough fellow. You get bitten. So my mouth been bitten by lots of girls, but no one has bit *me*. How do I answer my mama when she asks what I'm doing? How do I lie to her when she's needing a pacemaker? How do I tell her the truth?"

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Erica Jong

TESTAMENT

"loveroot, silkthread, crotch and vine . . ."
—Walt Whitman

"I trust all joy."
—Theodore Roethke

I, Erica Jong, in the midst of my life,
having had two parents, two sisters,
two husbands, two books of poems
& three decades of pain,

having cried for those who did not love me
& those who loved me—but not enough
& those whom I did not love—
declare myself now for joy.

There is pain enough to nourish us everywhere;
it is joy that is scarce.

There are corpses piled up to the mountains,
& tears to drown in,
& bile enough to swallow all day long.

Rage is a common weed.
Anger is cheap.

Righteous indignation
is the religion of the dead
in the house of the dead
where the dead speak to each other
in creaking voices,
each arguing a more unhappy childhood
than the other.

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Unhappiness is cheap.
Childhood is a universal affliction.
I say to hell with the analysts of minus & plus,
the life-shrinkers, the diminishers of joy.

I say to hell with anyone
who would suck on misery
like a pacifier
in a toothless mouth.
I say to hell with gloom.

Gloom is cheap.
Every night the earth resolves for darkness
& *then breaks its resolve*
in the morning.

Every night the demon lovers
come with their black penises like tongues,
with their double faces,
& their cheating mouths
& their glum religions of doom.

Doom is cheap.
If the apocalypse is coming,
let us wait for it in joy.

Let us not gnash our teeth
on the molars of corpses—
though the molars of corpses
are plentiful enough.

Let us not scorn laughter
though scorn is plentiful enough.

Let us laugh & bring plenty to the scorners—
for they scorn themselves.

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I myself have been a scorner
    & have chosen scornful men,
    men to echo all that was narrow in myself,
    men to hurt me as I hurt myself.

In my stinginess,
    my friends have been stingy.
In my narrowness,
    my men have been mean.

I resolve now for joy.

If that resolve means I must live alone,
    I accept aloneness.

If the joy house I inhabit must be
    a house of my own making,
    I accept that making.

No doom-saying, death-dealing, fucker of cunts
    can undo me now.

No joy-denyer can deny me now.
    For what I have is undeniable.
    I inhabit my own house,
    the house of my joy.

*

"Unscrew the locks from the doors!
Unscrew the doors themselves from their jambs!"

*

Dear Walt Whitman,
    horny old nurse to pain,
    speaker of "passwords primeval,"

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merit-refuser, poet of body & soul—
I scorned you at twenty
but turn to you now
in the fourth decade of my life,
having grown straight enough
to praise your straightness,
& plain enough
to speak to you plain
& simple enough
to praise your simplicity.

The doors open.
The metaphors themselves swing open wide!

Papers fall from my desk,
my desk teeters on the edge of the cosmos,
& I commit each word to fire.

I burn!
All night I write in suns across the page.
I fuel the "body electric" with midnight oil.
I write in neon sperm across the air.

*

You were "hankering, gross, mystical, nude."
You astonished with the odor of your armpits.
You cocked your hat as you chose;
you cocked your cock—
but you knew "the Me myself."

You believed in your soul
& believing, you made others
believe in theirs.

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The soul is contagious.
One man catches another's
like the plague;
& we are all patient spiders
to each other.

If we can spin the joythread
& also catch it—

if we can be sufficient to ourselves,
we need fear no entangling webs.

The loveroot will germinate.
The crotch will be a trellis for the vine,
& our threads will all be intermingled silk.

How to spin joy out of an empty heart?
The joy-egg germinates even in despair.

Orgasms of gloom convulse the world;
& the joy-seekers huddle together.

We meet on the pages of books & by beachwood fires.
We meet scrawled blackly in many-folded letters.
We know each other by free & generous hands.
We swing like spiders on each other's souls.

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Why Does a Great Man Love?

Gail Godwin

FACTS:

There are three women in his life.

The first is J. He falls in love with her in his twenties. He has done poorly at university and barely gets his degree. There is no sign of his being great. She is seven years younger and in poor health. He is working in an isolated place and their courtship is conducted through letters. His are impatient, angry, violent. He is a hunter, he says, in an uneasy pursuit of his prey. His love is a malady which has hugely infected him. How he loathes himself for flinging away his liberty on a creature whose sex has been ill-using men for five thousand years! She must make a decision now. He has been offered a tempting opportunity through an uncle's connections. He has been asked to become secretary to a great man. Ambition is an empty form and she alone can save him. He will nurse her back to health with his affections. He wants to live a simple, obscure life in the happiness of his love with J.

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He becomes secretary to the great man.

He keeps his employer's accounts and ghostwrites for him. He studies the dignitaries who call daily at the great man's house. Their self-important postures. Their meaningless chit-chat. Their witless puns. These are the men who govern the great world? He prefers a horse's ass then. He spends more and more time in his patron's library. He takes furious walks by himself in the park. He finds a bright little girl, the housekeeper's daughter, and educates her. She is H., who is fourteen years younger and in poor health. He teaches her how to read and write. He teaches her what to read and what to think. She has a quick mind combined with feminine pliability. "H. thinks like a man," he says proudly. Her handwriting is an exact copy of his, which will give future historians no little trouble. He presents her with a list of her faults and she ticks them off one by one as she overcomes them.

He goes away from his patron in a fury. No more of this toadying. He will be independent or damned. His schemes fail and his patron welcomes him back. He finds little H. grown into a graceful young woman (though he tells her frequently she is 'a little too fat'). She enjoys learned conversation, especially with men, yet does not speak unless it is to say the incisive thing. She refuses to discuss clothes, sex, scandal. If someone loses control or grows heated in his argument, she agrees at once and is silent. It prevents noise and saves time, she says. In spite of her poor health, she has great physical courage. One night she is alone with a servant in the house. Some thieves attempt a break-in. The servant flees. H. fetches a pistol, tiptoes in darkness to the dining room window and shoots one of the thieves neatly through the heart.

He becomes indispensible to his patron. He carries messages to heads of state, and speaks his mind. He publishes his essays in significant journals. People cringe, then praise his vitriolic insights. He writes poetry, still heavy with a young man's awe of the classics, but already bearing signs of the weird combination of spleen and energy which will become his trademark.

During all this time, what of J.? Their correspondence flags,

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but continues. Her resistance softens. His stipulations harden. Finally she writes that she might consider marriage now. He sends back a list of his requirements for a wife. We hear no more from J.

His patron dies. By this time he is established on his own.

He buys a house in the country. He invites H. to come there. This is made respectable by the following means: along with H. goes her homely cousin who smokes cigars and stays in the room embroidering whenever the two of them are together. While he is in the country, H. and her cousin stay in nearby lodgings. While he is in town, the two women live in his house.

Now he spends much of his year in town. He dines almost every evening at the homes of famous people. He becomes a personality. People are fascinated by this great swarthy man who doesn't give a damn about them. He lets it be known that if any woman wants to make his acquaintance she will first have to go out of her way to prove it is not 'just as a man' she wants to know him, but because of his merits. And she must make all the advances. He becomes irresistible to the opposite sex.

There is a famous beauty, the toast of society. She says she would like to meet him but can't comply with his eccentric demand. It would lower the status of future ladies of the toast, she says. A truce is arranged by her fourteen-year-old cousin. He draws up an agreement between them, whereas the beauty will privately make the advances to the great man who will, in return, accept her publicly as his acquaintance and never mention her concession. The treaty is solemnized at a private dinner held at the fourteen-year-old cousin's home. His mother is a widow of some fortune who has three other children. One of these children is E. E. is twenty-one years younger than himself and in poor health. Like H. she has a quick and grasping mind, cares nothing for parties, clothes and gossip. Unlike H., E. is lazy and temperamental. She likes the idea of ideas but hates to study. She is self-willed but not strong-willed. Soon he is dining regularly at the widow's

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house. He leaves a spare suit of clothes there. He takes on the education of young E. on the evenings he is not dining with famous people. She reads everything he tells her, not because she is interested in the subject, but because she is interested in him. She learns to ape his political opinions. He catches her out on this, but is pleased with her progress in general. If only she will rid herself of her 'romantic ideas'.

But what of H. who waits in his country home, playing cards and eating chocolates with her cigar-smoking cousin? Has he forgotten H.? Far from it. Every night, no matter how late he returns to his rooms, he writes an account of his day to H. Secure in the knowledge that she will devour the most trivial detail concerning him, he records menus, the price of wine, dinner table chit-chat, temperature and weather conditions, his secret fear of walking home in the dark because of a notorious bunch of hoodlums who have been cutting off people's noses, how he suffers melancholy, what new pills he is taking, how he is plagued by stomach disorders, how he has taken in his trousers two inches, how he suffers like Job from boils, from an itching malady, how he has resolved to walk more. Often as he writes to H., he lapses into baby talk, forming the sounds with his lips as he writes. He mails these letters in great packets and addresses them to the cigar-smoking cousin to preserve proprieties. He mails chocolates and cigars. He fusses endlessly over H.'s health. He does not always mention when he dines at the widow's house.

After a time, he leaves the town in a fit of disgust at politics, dinners, human society. He returns to H. in the country and enjoys the company he professes dearest to him in the world, always in the presence of the cousin. H. is in her thirties now. She is stout from eating the chocolates he has sent her from town. He writes her birthday poems, taking four years off her age. He writes letters to E. in town, encouraging her to read and to stop writing him so much.

E. disobeys. She deluges him with letters. Soon she drops the ruse of politics and books and splays her female soul all over the page. Why hasn't he written her? It has been——

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days._____ days._____ days. A correspondent in China would have answered by now. Why did he teach her to prefer only the best, then leave her high and dry? Why can't he speak his feelings? What about all those evenings they 'drank coffee' together? "I'm sure by now you have wished me religious," she writes, "so I might pay these troublesome devotions to heaven. But still you'd be the deity I'd worship."

He writes back that she should walk more, ride more, read books on history and travel. "The best maxim I know in life is drink your coffee when you can and when you can't, do without it." He suggests she might save paper and time by writing simply '——— ——— Cad' when she has to express these emotions. He fusses endlessly over E.'s health.

Her mother the widow dies and leaves her a small fortune. She announces her intention to follow him to the country and buy a place near his. "If you do, I won't see you," he replies.

She does and he sees her. But not enough, never enough. As soon as he leaves her, she begins pestering him to come back. "——— ——— Cad: It has been days since you were here. It has been days. Have you forgotten me? I was born with violent passions which have terminated in this one unexpressible passion I have for you."

"Cad assures me he esteems you above all things," he replies, "but begs that you will not make yourself or him unhappy by imaginations."

E. dies. She is thirty-five. He is not mentioned in her will. She leaves the bulk of her fortune to his public rival. The rival expresses bewildered gratitude. He has never laid eyes on the lady in his life. He uses her money for a humanitarian scheme which his rival has repeatedly opposed. She has also saved and numbered all his letters and kept copies of her own. Her executors proceed to have these letters published as she has instructed. A friend stops them. But a long poem gets into print. It is a poem written by the great man, describing their relationship beneath a thin veil of pastoral. There are several provocative lines which say in effect: "did we mix books and love together? The world will never know."

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H. of course sees the published poem. An ill-meaning friend says to H.: "Ah, he must have thought a lot of E. to write such fine verses." H. replies coolly that he can write finely on a broomstick if he wishes to.

H. dies five years later at 6 p.m. on a Sunday evening. He receives the news at 8 p.m. Sunday is his night for company. He remains impassive til the last guest leaves at 11 p.m. Then he goes to his room and begins writing his famous eulogy of H. He does not attend the funeral because he is too ill. During the service, he sits up in bed and continues writing her eulogy. H. leaves all her money to a penniless hospital chaplain.

He lives on. He becomes greater, old, deaf, partially blind, and finally speechless. Some say mad as well, but others say no, it is the intolerable pain. At the last he refuses to see anyone because his incapacities enrage him. He is attended only by a nurse. His last recorded words are "I am a fool." He is buried (beside H.) under the epitaph he wrote for himself some years ago.

RUMORS:

re J.:

Not many. Her letters, like H.'s, have been lost or destroyed. There are no pictures. Judging from his side of the correspondence, J.'s reluctance to marry is based on his poverty combined with her ill health. A frail person, she might also take fright at his extreme metaphors of love. Does she die young like her successors? Does she marry a wealthy merchant and have healthy children? We don't know. Do we care? Somehow J. does not set fire to our imaginations. We feel she has little to do with the man we know.

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re H.:

[1]Both he and H. are illegitimate children of the man who employed him as secretary. Therefore they cannot marry.

[2]H. is passionately in love with him, but having studied his character from an early age realizes she can keep him only if she hides her passion. Only the cigar-smoking cousin knows the agonies H. suffers. Those hours, those nights, those years when he's away in town. H. to her cousin: "What is he doing now? Do you think there's someone else? Tell me honestly, do you think he cares for me? Should I leave him? Maybe if I left him he'd realize he couldn't live without me. But how can I leave him? He isn't even here. If he doesn't love me, then who? Here I am in his house, trusted with all his things. Who else receives his packages of night letters? In baby talk?"

[3]H. reads between the lines of the night letters. "Who is this widow you are always dining with? Are they really such good company?" He writes back angrily, "As good a company as I myself." H. is silenced. She decides she must wait out her rival.

[4]H. is secretly married to him. On her deathbed she begs him to consummate their union so she can rest in peace. He turns on his heel and leaves the room, never to see her again.

[5]He is secretly married to H. On her deathbed he begs her to consummate their union. She says no, it is too late. He turns on his heel and leaves the room, never to see her again.

[6]H. and her cigar-smoking cousin enjoy a lifelong Lesbian relationship under his protection.

[7]He is impotent.

re E.:

[1]He falls in love with E. and wants to marry her. But he has

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already set up H. and her cousin in the country and hates disruptions.

[2]He falls in love with E. and wants to marry her. But he is already secretly married to H.

[3]He loves H. and he loves E. He cannot give up either. Since neither presses him, why should he?

[4]H. is frigid, but he loves her conversation. He has sexual relations with E.

[5]The many references to "drinking coffee" in the correspondence between E. and him are sexual metaphors.

[6]E. finds out about H. living in his house in the country. She writes to H. and asks if they are married. H. sends back a single word: yes. E., who is tubercular anyway, dies of grief.

[7]E. finds out about H. living in his house in the country. She writes H. and asks if they are married. H. passes on the letter to him without a word. He rides in a fury to E.'s, flings the letter on her table without a word and leaves. E. who is tubercular anyway, dies of grief.

[8]E.'s gardener on E. many years after her death: "She never went out and had little company. She was always melancholy except when HE came. Then she seemed happy. When she expected him, she always planted a laurel or two with her own hands. To make sure he'd come, she said. When it was fair, they sat in the bower. There were two seats and a table. It overlooked the river. There were always books and writing materials on the table between them. She often sat in the bower alone, talking to herself."

CONJECTURES:

[1]Look at the pattern. Each time the woman gets seven years

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younger. He takes on the education of H. and E. His problem is clear. A predilection for nymphets coupled with a Pygmalion complex.

[2]A definitive case of arrested sexuality. Everyone knows how he was abducted by his nurse while still an infant. The violent adolescent crush on J. The baby talk in the night letters to H. The recoil from E.'s frank passionate advances. The fact he prefers letters to personal contact.

[3]He is one of those men Dr. Jung would describe as 'anima-ridden.' He must project his own inner-woman on the cardboard figures of J. and H. and E. His image of them is more important than their reality. J. must remain the aloof and distant woman who spurns him. H. must remain rational, platonic, devoted. E. must—what damnable trouble he has with E! She keeps threatening to become a flesh-and-blood creature in her own right. Some say he loves her most for this failing.

[4]Like all artists, he shapes and orchestrates his life to fit his art. He stunts reality in order that fantasy may grow. He writes a birthday poem to H. "at thirty-six" when she is forty. When H. is dying, he composes his series of famous prayers to comfort himself. He stays home from her funeral and writes the celebrated recollections of H. In his poem to E., he allows for the possibility of sexual love. He gives pseudonyms to J. and H. and E. and the world knows these names and forgets their own.

[5]All three women exist, wait, suffer, age and die in order that a single image may be perfected. Each woman is a mere suggestion, a facet, of his Ideal: a nine-year-old girl, forty-feet-high, who washes him and tends him and puts him to bed, who carries him round her garden in a box, makes him seven fine shirts, teaches him languages, becomes his 'little nurse' and 'loves him to excess'. The three women have done their small part to bring the dream full cycle: so the nurse can again become the nursed, the teacher taught, the great man

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laid to sleep on the bosom of the giant child he can't resist yet whose entire life is consecrated to his service. At last in a land called Brobdingnag, the creator is contained in his own creation.

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

FICTION

Jack Cope (*Drinker of the Bitter Water*) is the author of *The Dawn Comes Twice, The Rainmaker, The Student of Zend*, and most recently *Alley Cat*, a collection of stories, all published in England. In America his work has appeared in *Harper's, Mademoiselle, Holiday*, and *The Paris Review* #18. He is the founder-editor of the South African literary quarterly, *Contrast*.

Gail Godwin (*Why Does a Great Man Love?*) has published three novels, *The Perfectionists* (1970), *Glass People* (1972), and most recently *The Odd Woman* (1974). Her stories have appeared in *Harper's, Esquire* and *The Paris Review*. She lives in Stone Ridge, New York.

Herbert Gold (*Max and the Pacemaker*) has published a number of novels; his most recent is *Swiftie the Magician* (McGraw-Hill), Fall, 1974. He lives in San Francisco and goes to Haiti frequently.

Harvey Jacobs (*The Return to Puerto Vallarte of Benny the Buro*) has published stories in numerous magazines, including *Esquire, Playboy, Cosmopolitan*, and *Transatlantic Review*. A collection of stories, *The Egg of the Glak*, was published by Harper and Row. He is currently at work on a novel, *Summer on a Mountain of Spices*, due to be published by them in 1975.

Peter Matthiessen (*Far Tortuga*) has published numerous books, the most recent of which include *At Play in the Fields of the Lord*, which was nominated for a National Book Award, *The Wind Birds*, and *The Tree Where Man Was Born*. *Far Tortuga* will be published by Random House this spring. A founder of *The Paris Review*, he is at work on a book about a pilgrimage into the mountains of northwest Nepal.

INTERVIEWS

George Plimpton (*Joseph Heller and Peter Matthiessen interviews*) is the Editor of *The Paris Review*. His most recent books are *Mad Ducks and Bears* and *One for the Record*. Editor of *Writers at Work*, volumes I-IV, and *The American Literary Anthology*, he lives in New York City.

POETRY

Michael Benedikt is the author of three books of poems, *The Body, Sky* and *Mole Notes*. He is the editor of *The Poetry of Surrealism*, just published by Little, Brown, and *The Prose Poem: An International Anthology* (Dell). Currently Poetry Editor of *The Paris Review*, he lives in New York City.

Randy Blasing has published two pamphlets, *Months of Sundays* and *Places*. Co-translator of Nazin Hikmet's selected poems, which Braziller will bring out in 1975, he lives in Providence, R.I.

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Jay Boyer's work has appeared in a number of magazines including *The Nation* and *Partisan Review*. He currently teaches at SUNY, Buffalo and is completing a novel: *If the Mischievous Monkey Doesn't Drop a Cold Penny Down the Back of a Goldfish*.

Tom Disch has two books forthcoming from Alfred Knopf: *Getting into Death*, a short story collection, late in 1975, and a novel, presently in-progress, *The Pressure of Time*. He is the editor of an anthology, *The New Improved Sun* coming out the Spring of 1975, and a forthcoming collection of poems, *The Champs of Paradise*.

Erica Jong's new collection of poetry, *Loveroot*, of which this is the opening poem, will be published in June 1975. Her two previous books of poems are *Fruits & Vegetables* and *Half-Lives*. She is currently involved with the film of her first novel, *Fear of Flying*, and at work on her second novel, *How to Save Your Own Life*. She lives in New York City.

Adam LeFevre is 24 years old. This is his first appearance in print. He has lived in Coeymans, New York, Eagle Butte, South Dakota, Boston, Massachusetts, and is currently "on antibiotics" in Iowa City, Iowa.

W.S. Merwin's numerous books of poetry and translations include *Writings to an Unfinished Accompaniment, Asian Figures, Transparents of the World*, and *The Carrier of Ladders* for which he won the Pulitzer Prize in 1972.

Pat Nolan's work has previously appeared in *The Paris Review* #51, *The World, Adventures In Poetry, Rolling Stone* and other magazines. A recipient of the Poets Foundation Award in 1972, Cranium Press published a book of his poems, *The Chinese Quartet* in 1973. He is the editor of *The End*, and lives in Monte Rio, California.

Greg Orr is currently a Junior Fellow in the University of Michigan Society of Fellows. His first collection of poems, *Burning The Empty Nests* (Harper & Row) was published in 1973. His second collection, *Gathering the Bones Together* is due in May, 1975 from Harper & Row.

Dannye Romine's poems have been published or are forthcoming in *Southern Poetry Review, Roanoke Review* and *DeKalb Literary Arts Journal*, and an historical essay is scheduled soon in *Southern Humanities Review*. She teaches in the Poetry-in-the-Schools program in Charlotte, N.C. and is giving a poetry workshop this fall at the Free University at The University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

Anne Sexton sent the following contributors note, dated July 29, 1974. "So glad you like two of the poems and will print them in the Fall issue of *The Paris Review*. A contributor's note? *The Awful Rowing Towards God* will be my eighth book and all are in print in paperback (small ad). I am forty-five, divorced, and living in Weston, Massachusetts, Professor of Creative Writing at Boston University . . . if you can add to this, it would be fine with

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me. For instance, you can say I live in Weston with my two dalmations." She died on October 4, 1974.

Brian Swann is publishing a number of books in the next 12 months: *The Whale's Scars, Selected Poems of Andrea Zanzotto* (with Ruth Feldman), *Shema: Poems of Primo Levi* (with Ruth Feldman), *Selected Poems of Tudor Arghezi* (with Michael Impey). In 1972, Princeton published *The Collected Poems of Lucio Piccolo* (with Ruth Feldman).

L.L. Zeiger teaches in Queens' high schools as a per diem substitute in English so that she has more time to write. This is her first appearance in print. She lives in Great neck, New York with her husband, two children and a cat.

POETRY PORTFOLIO

Charles Simic's most recent books of poems are *Dismantling the Silence, Return to a Place Lit by a Glass of Milk* (both from Braziller) and *White* New Rivers Press). He lives in Northwood, New Hampshire.

ART

Robert Horvitz graduated from Yale University and is currently a lecturer at Rhode Island School of design. His most recent show was at the Nova Scotia College of Art, Fall, 1974. He has published a number of articles in *Artforum* and presently lives in Boston, Mass.

Brice Marden attended Boston University School of Fine & Applied Arts and the Yale University School of Art and Architecture. He has shown extensively. This fall he was included in "Eight Contemporary Artists" at the Museum of Modern Art, and had a one man show at the Bykert Gallery in New York. He currently lives in New York.

Duane Michals was born in McKeesport, Pennsylvania where he attended high school with Andy Warhol. His work has appeared in *Vogue, Scientific American, Fortune* and numerous other publications. His books include *Sequences* (Doubleday), 1970 and *Journey of the Spirit After Death* (Winter House), 1971. His photographs are in the permanent collections of The Museum of Modern Art and The Chicago Art Institute, among others. His most recent exhibition was at Light Gallery in New York City.

* * * *

Erratum

The Paris Review apologizes to Frederick Busch, author of *Widow Water*, for the misspelling of his name in the Fall 1974 issue.

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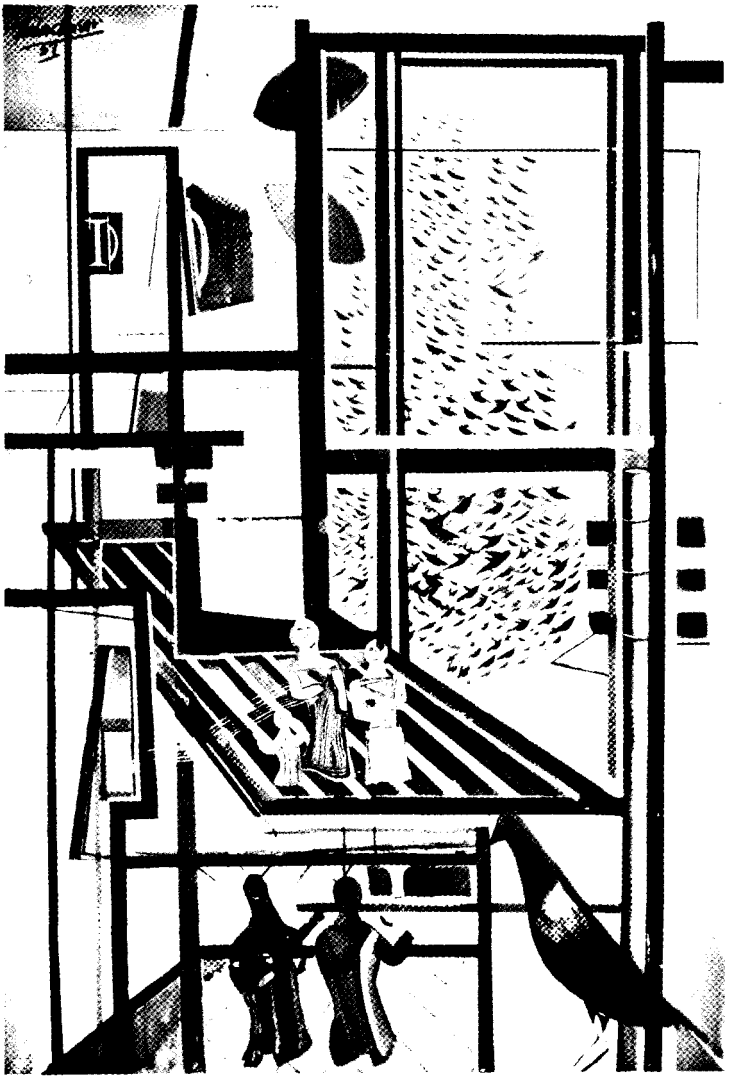

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